

SUPPORTING 2SLGBTQIA+ STUDENTS:

A Pastoral Response





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Page 04

To Listen: Context

Page 05

To Reason: The Law in Ontario

Page 06

To Propose: Hope for the Future

Page 11

Enabling a Pastoral Response: Encounter, Listen, Discern

Page 13

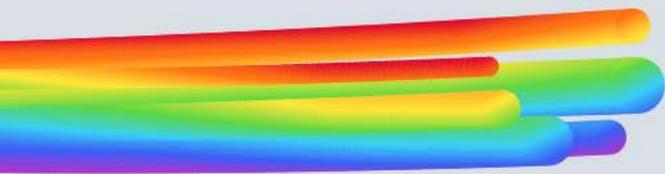
Common Questions:

Considerations for an Individually Focused Response

Page 17

A Note About Privacy and Confidentiality

Page 19



SUPPORTING 2SLGBTQIA+ STUDENTS:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All who enter our Catholic schools come to the process of formation with a personal story, experienced as a journey and shaped by their diverse and unique life experiences. Individual stories are lived out in a communal context. The new *Directory for Catechesis*¹ addresses the complex needs of persons today and the best methodologies of proclamation and catechesis to meet these needs. It acknowledges the challenges of our current culture and the call to hope as a required response. The recent pastoral letter from the Ontario Bishops, *Renewing the Promise* (2018), calls us to live this hope as a community that encourages engagement, accompanies, builds relationships, instils hope and forms joyful disciples. We want to create an environment where people can listen and learn from each other about why it is important to talk about 2SLGBTQIA+ identities and the varied intersectionalities that exist for these students. In *Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education*, there is an emphasis on listening in this context described through three guiding principles “best-suited to meet the needs of both individuals and communities: to listen, to reason and to propose.”² A Catholic training module entitled, “*Human Dignity: Our Catholic Call to Love — Inclusive Communities Supporting Transgender Students*” (2018) was developed by the Catholic Education Partnership for the Diocese of Hamilton for the Catholic community as an initial attempt to support transgender students. A review of this document, in light of these principles, as well as in response to our evolving contexts, has resulted in the following guidelines offered to our Catholic education community. In addition, practical suggestions for a pastoral response and commonly asked questions and considerations for individually-focussed responses are included. These guidelines, which replace the former document, are based on current multi-disciplinary research and understanding. This dialogue continues in the context of our Church and our world.

TO LISTEN: CONTEXT

Our Catholic schools function in a secular society and serve the needs of people who come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. It is important, "...to educate children and young people to respect every person in their particularity and difference, so that no one should suffer bullying, violence, insults or unjust discrimination based on their specific characteristics (such as special needs, race, religion, sexual tendencies, etc.). Essentially, this involves educating for active and responsible citizenship, which is marked by the ability to welcome all legitimate expressions of human personhood with respect."³

In Catholic Social Teaching, there is an emphasis on responding to the most vulnerable. In 2018, the Ontario Human Rights Commission found "65% of trans youth aged 14–18 were bullied", and "Over 50% of all trans youth reported engaging in self-harm, and 43% of trans youth aged 19-25 attempted suicide."⁴ As articulated by the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, Catholic Social Teaching demands that we place a "Preferential Option for the Poor" where, "The moral test of any society is based on how the most vulnerable are treated. God's love is universal, so this principle does not intend that we should focus on the poor to the exclusion of others, but rather that we are called to prioritize those who are most in need of our Solidarity."⁵ Here the term 'poor' is intended to reference the most vulnerable in our society. In Ontario Catholic schools, as reported by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, these are non-binary or transgender students. According to queer⁶-positive researcher, Tonya Callaghan of the University of Manitoba, "...Catholic education leaders may return to the tradition of [Catholic Social Teaching](#) involving justice for the weakest for guidance in how to embrace and even celebrate gender and sexual diversity they encounter in Catholic schools."⁷

Greteman cautions that, "While we recognize that harassment and resultant risks are disproportionately a reality for LGBTQ youth both in Canada and we are concerned that a preoccupation with LGBTQ youth's experiences of harm runs the risk of positioning 'queerness as liability.'"⁸ It is important to emphasize that despite their vulnerability in schools, 2SLGBTQIA+ students have engaged in activism and demanded that their human personhood be treated with respect, especially in recent years with raising the Pride flag in June. Perhaps the most poignant of the Catholic Social teachings in this regard is the emphasis on Solidarity which "means much more than some acts of sporadic generosity. It is to think and to act in terms of community, of the priority of the life of all over the appropriation of goods by a few. It is also to fight against the structural causes of poverty, inequality, lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and labor rights."⁹

Brian Wenke, Executive Director of the "It Gets Better Project" suggests, "If you don't have a solid understanding of who you're trying to reach, you'll never find them." Our students, staff and community have made many attempts to articulate why it is important that the Pride flag (and one might now consider the progress or inclusion flag) be a visible, outward facing sign as symbol of solidarity, inclusion and acceptance. It communicates for our children, youth, staff, and families that this is a safe, welcoming place to learn and grow. Regardless of whether your board has flown the flag or not, students are engaging in activism more broadly using Gay-Straight or Gender-Sexuality Alliances and, "these clubs are equally sites for gender activism, whereby transgender, genderqueer and non-binary students have been playing an active role, in both Catholic and secular public school boards, as manifested by their commitment to educating about gender diversity."¹⁰ Relationships and dialogue with students about their stated needs are paramount to creating safer spaces in Catholic schools.

TO REASON: THE LAW IN ONTARIO



In so far as this issue relates to the world of education, it is clear that by its very nature, education can help lay the foundations for peaceful dialogue and facilitate a fruitful meeting together of peoples and a meeting of minds.”¹¹

Publicly-funded Catholic schools enjoy denominational rights in the province of Ontario, enshrined in Section 93 of the Constitution Act of 1867.¹² These rights allow schools to teach the Ontario curriculum with a Catholic lens, under the jurisdiction of provincial law. In 2012, the Ontario Human Rights Code was officially amended with an addition to school responsibilities under the law. It states that publicly-funded schools in Ontario, including Catholic schools, must:

- (a.1) promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils, including pupils of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, **sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression**, age, marital status, family status or disability;
- (a.2) promote the prevention of bullying¹²;

This Act also expanded the definition of bullying to include electronic or online varieties. It also made the requirement of school boards to create, “a positive school climate and prevent inappropriate behaviour, including bullying, sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia or biphobia.”¹³ In addition, this act enshrined the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ students and their allies to have Gay-Straight Alliances, sometimes now called Gender-Sexuality Alliances as extra-curricular groups by stating:

Every board shall support pupils who want to establish and lead activities and organizations that promote a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of and respect for others and the creation of a positive school climate, including...

- (d) activities or organizations that promote the awareness and understanding of, and respect for, people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including organizations with the name gay-straight alliance or another name.¹⁴

In addition, “For greater certainty, neither the board nor the principal shall refuse to allow a pupil to use the name gay-straight alliance or a similar name for an organization described in clause.”¹⁵ The Ontario Human Rights Commission further clarified:

Separate schools in Ontario have special rights guaranteed by the Constitution and by the Education Act. Section 19 means that the [*Ontario Human Rights Code*] cannot affect those rights, which are mainly related to the existence and funding of Roman Catholic schools. Otherwise, the right to be free from discrimination under the *Code* applies to Catholic schools. All schools have a legal duty to provide students with an education environment free from harassment and other forms of discrimination because of *Code* grounds.¹⁶

The existence and funding of Catholic Schools is currently enshrined in law, but so is their responsibility under the law to uphold the Ontario Human Rights Code amendments cited above.

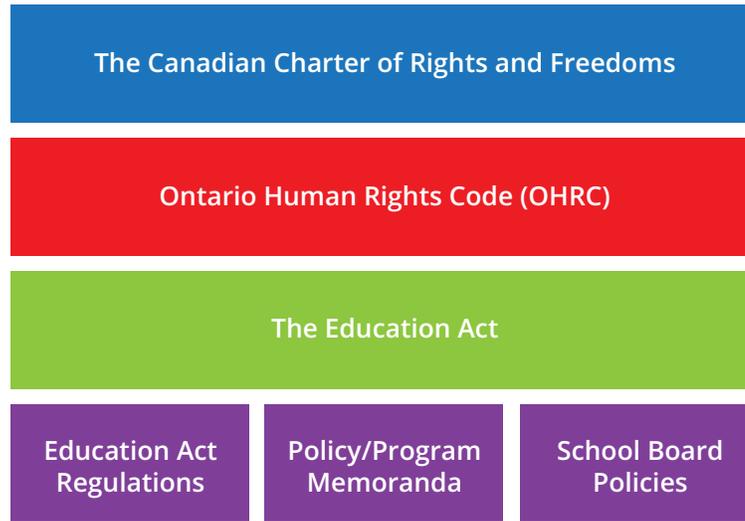
Most recently, federal legislation to ban conversion therapy practices in Canada became law on January 7, 2022. Under Bill C-4, several new offenses have been created within Canada's Criminal Code, including:

- Subjecting another person to conversion therapy, including by providing conversion therapy to that person.
- Removing a child from the country with the intention of sending them to conversion therapy outside of Canada.
- Promoting or advertising conversion therapy.
- Receiving a financial or other material benefit from the provision of conversion therapy.

Research has demonstrated that an inclusive school culture and climate is important for all students to achieve success and personal well-being. Evidence has shown that this is especially important for students who are, or who identify as members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. The *Directory of Catechesis* emphasizes this as well, speaking in particular to the challenge of gender and gender identity, acknowledging that, "The Church is well aware of the complexity of the personal situations that are lived out, at times, in a conflicted way. She does not judge persons, but asks that they be accompanied always and in whatever situation."¹⁸

It is a requirement of school boards to create, "A positive school climate and prevent inappropriate behaviour, including bullying, sexual assault, gender-based violence and incidents based on homophobia, transphobia or biphobia."¹³

LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT: OUR RESPONSIBILITY



The following links outline the legislative requirements, as well as the Ministry resources that have been developed to support school boards.

- [Criminal Code of Canada on Conversion Therapy](#)
- [The Education Act](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
- [Prohibitive Grounds for Discrimination](#)
- [PPM 119, Equity and Inclusive Education, April 22, 2013 Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools](#)
- [PPM 144, Bullying Prevention and Intervention, December 5, 2012](#)
- [PPM 145, Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour, December 5, 2012](#)
- [Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools \(2014 Edition\)](#)
- [Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, Realizing the Promise of Diversity \(2009 Edition\)](#)

SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH ONTARIO: WHAT STUDENTS NEED

1. Schools and classrooms that are safe — physically and emotionally — and where they feel welcome, included, heard, comfortable, and confident.
2. Skills and tools for self-care, managing stress, nurturing relationships, and enhancing their sense of strength and identity.
3. Caring adults who notice when they may be struggling, and who provide knowledgeable responsive support.
4. Encouragement to seek additional help when they need it, and guidance towards appropriate support.
5. Quick access to the right level of service (in schools or community mental health).

THE INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION (ICE): WORKING ON BEHALF OF ALL PARTNERS

Throughout the 2019/2020 school year the Institute for Catholic Education worked with its respective partners including the Ontario Bishops and the Education Commission to articulate the shared commitment to equity, diversity and inclusive school communities.

On May 19, 2020, a memo was sent to all Catholic Directors and the partners (Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, Ontario Catholic School Business Officials' Association, Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association Ontario and English Catholic Teachers' Association).

The following messages were shared in this memo demonstrating the commitment to safe and welcoming communities:

- The bishops recognize and value the good work of Catholic schools in providing support and accompaniment to students who may identify as LGBTQ+ and expressed their appreciation,
- The bishops understand the need for Boards to communicate their commitment to ensuring equitable, safe, and inclusive school communities,
- The bishops are supportive of Boards taking a positive and proactive approach to express this commitment.

INTERSECTIONALITY, PRIVILEGE AND POSITIONALITY: AN AMPLIFIED PANDEMIC DIALOGUE

Recent events that the world has faced have allowed for a refocusing of our attention on the issues affecting those most vulnerable. Following a series of lockdowns and numerous tragic events involving the deaths of people of colour, there was a rallying cry for actions of solidarity and the Black Lives Matter [BLM] movement emerged with renewed vigour in June 2020 during what is widely known as Pride month. In many ways the two are complementary as both BLM and Pride are focussed on the community speaking up against injustice and making the noted individuals/groups visible. The pandemic has finally done what many have long called for and put the discussion about the impact of privilege, positionality and intersectionality on the community front and centre.

Dr. Amy Tan in her graphic and notes [“Power and Privilege in Canada”](#) defines privilege as “unearned advantage given to only a particular group of people in a system/society that is not enjoyed by other groups.” She furthers explains that,

“By intersections, [she] means that each area of privilege or oppression intersects with other areas to create a new layered identity. It’s **not** just simply that a person can add up all the areas where they may have more privilege and then subtract the areas where they may have less privilege. We are all 3-dimensional human beings. How our different areas of identity overlap and are related to each other influences our individual lived experience, and any discrimination/inequity we may face in Canada.”¹⁹

To truly uphold the Catholic Social Teaching of Solidarity, we must ask ourselves how our individual privileges might create bias in our decision making. We must consider how we can best listen to the students we serve.

“Catechesis is taking others by the hand and accompanying them...because Christian life does not even out or standardize, but rather enhances the uniqueness of each child of God.”²⁴

Noted law professor, Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ over 30 years ago. When asked what it means today, she explained, “We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.” Noted philosopher and theorist, bell hooks²¹ stresses the “importance of understanding difference, of the ways race and class status determine the degree to which one can assert male domination and privilege and most importantly the ways racism and sexism are interlocking systems of domination which uphold and sustain one another.”²² When considering the needs of transgender students, also paying attention to their intersectional identities (such as race, social class, citizenship status etc.) and positionality of privilege is essential.

Showing up for others can be unifying and life-changing. In a time where many people are feeling more isolated and anxious than usual, we know that kindness and unity are needed now more than ever. Drawing on the example of Christ, who preached a message of love and inclusion through His ministry, is the message that our Catholic schools are called to action. We are all seeking support, understanding, and thoughtful conversations. This is especially true for our students; the children and youth entrusted to our care. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms and values this need for support, encounter and accompaniment. Pope Benedict described it as such: “In its very structure, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* follows the development of the faith right up to the great themes of daily life. On page after page, we find that what is presented here is no theory, but an encounter with a person ... the teaching of the Catechism on the moral life acquires its full meaning if placed in relationship

with faith, liturgy and prayer.”²³ It is in this spirit of encounter that we meet students who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ in Catholic schools.

We are reminded in Micah 6:8: “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” We are called to work for justice. In fact, our students, staff and community are demanding it. There is desire for conversation, dialogue and a focus on connection. There has been more attention being paid to structural inequalities that keep us apart, and that have been starkly highlighted by the pandemic.

Our Catholic schools can and must engage fully and relentlessly to address bullying, discrimination and harassment in all its forms and manifestations. We can do this by building inclusive communities that respect the dignity of every person and advancing social justice for all families. In this way, we respond to the Catholic Social Teachings of Solidarity and the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, as outlined above.

Pope Francis said, “Catechesis is taking others by the hand and accompanying them...because Christian life does not even out or standardize, but rather enhances the uniqueness of each child of God.”²⁴

It is understood that in our Catholic schools, it is important that topics such as human sexuality, gender identity and gender expression, as well as initiatives that promote understanding of and respect for difference, are discussed against a clear moral background. Resource personnel and resources are available to support this work. We don’t do this work alone. Educators are encouraged to engage with mental professionals, administrators, consultants, coordinators, community partners and faith-leaders. Properly understood, difference is something to be recognized in a society that honours diversity, intersectionality and acknowledges the disproportionate privileges some enjoy over others while working for more equitable distribution thereof and human rights. Respect, compassion and sensitivity must guide our actions.²⁵

TO PROPOSE: HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”
Jeremiah 29:11

As we look to provide hope for the future, we are reminded that, “The Catholic school should be an education community in which the human person can express themselves and grow in his or her humanity, in a process of relational dialogue, interacting in a constructive way, exercising tolerance, understanding different points of view and creating trust in an atmosphere of authentic harmony.”²⁶

Ontario is a pluralistic society. In any school, some community members may live in same-sex relationships, and same-sex couples may be part of the group of parents; some students may choose to openly identify and recognize their sexual orientation during their years in school or they may identify as transgender. Such is the reality in the educational context in Ontario. Denying this is simply not understanding or appreciating who is coming through our school, classroom and workplace doors, each and every day.

The well-being of all our students and staff is met through a focus on equity and inclusion. It also aligns with boards’ equity plans, and mission and vision statements regarding inclusion and belonging, as well as student and staff well-being.

In our Catholic schools, we welcome and value all students and celebrate diversity within our communities. We believe that we are all created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26), and we teach our students to honour the dignity in each person by treating one another with care, compassion and respect. We are committed to nurturing safe and inclusive learning environments that are an expression of God’s love and mercy in this world.

With our partners, staff and families we want to create safe, inclusive and welcoming environments of learning and social justice. In the spirit of care, compassion and respect for all, we signal that we remain firm in our resolve, that the work our staff and students engage in each and every day will ignite the courage to faithfully confront injustice, racism, oppression, and violence while also advocating valiantly for reconciliation, peace, equality, healing, and hope.

“We believe that we are all created in the image and likeness of God.”
(Genesis 1:26)

In speaking about transgender youth, Father James Martin S.J., calls each one of us to animate the example of Jesus:

I think one of the most important things is to remember how at-risk transgender kids are and how vulnerable they are, how much they are sort of at risk for suicide, how persecuted they are, how bullied they are, beaten they are, and how excluded they are. And I think that Catholic schools should bend over backwards to try to take care of people who are in any way on the margins.

This is what Jesus does. And I think transgender youth are amongst the most marginalized and persecuted of people. And so something small, seemingly small, which is using preferred pronouns, can be a great help to them. – Fr. James Martin S.J., in a podcast interview on [CBC's Tapestry](#) (2001)

This stands in contrast to some of the questions that were raised as part of the consultation with the Catholic partners in the Diocese of Hamilton to review the resource to support transgender members of our schools. "Give us the script!" "What exactly does the Church teach?" "What Scripture passages should we use?" The underlying assumption is that there is standard or patent responses that we can give. This is an erroneous assumption.

In the spirit of care, compassion and respect for all, we signal that we remain firm in our resolve, that the work our staff and students engage in each and every day will ignite the courage to faithfully confront injustice, racism, oppression, and violence while also advocating valiantly for reconciliation, peace, equality, healing and hope.

ENABLING A PASTORAL RESPONSE: ENCOUNTER, LISTEN, DISCERN

Pope Francis recently launched an ambitious two-year process, the 'Synod on Synodality 2021–2023,' inviting the church to deep listening, dialogue and to question itself. The process invites the Church to consider three key action words that are integral if the process is to be successful: Encounter, Listen and Discern.

These are the three central movements of the Gospel story, the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). Following the crucifixion, Jesus encounters the two disciples on the road. They are grieving, confused, distraught and despondent. He asks them what they are talking about, listens to them and discerns his response. At first the disciples do not recognize the risen Jesus. It is an experience of a gradual reveal. Jesus spends time listening to them and converses with them. Jesus accepts their invitation to share a meal, the disciples recognize him and ultimately decide to return to Jerusalem. It is in the breaking of the bread around the table that Jesus is fully revealed to the disciples. Jesus encounters, listens, and discerns his response. This threefold pattern of encounter, listening and discernment is the fundamental way of living the Christian life.

Our Catholic schools are a metaphor for the table. Through our words and our actions, we create a welcoming, inclusive space for all to grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus. When we are approached by someone who is questioning their gender identity this is the moment of 'Encounter.' It is rooted in relationship; person to person. We are called to be welcoming and accepting of the person in this moment. We don't need to be afraid or immediately have the action plan. We just need to meet the person where they are. The gift we bring to them is eyes to see, ears to listen, hearts to love, and the offer of a safe place to be and for dialogue.

It is in this safe and trusting place that we need to 'Listen' to their story; to 'listen with our hearts' as the Holy Father calls us to do. We don't need to agree, or fully understand or to have all the answers we just need to truly hear them. So many times in an encounter with an individual they just simply want to be heard. The gift we bring them is the gift of allowing them to speak their story, to be seen, and to be heard.



Pope Francis reminds us, "Let us not sound-proof our hearts. Let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. So often our certainties can make us closed. Let us listen to one-another."²⁷

We many need the assistance of others with different skill sets and expertise to help us address the needs of the child of God that is before us.

Finally, we need to 'Discern,' where do we go from here? Every encounter and listening to a particular individual will require discernment about potential next steps. There is no script or Scripture passage or Church teaching that will take the place of authentic discernment. It is understood that there are legal, educational, and board requirements that must be followed however, most importantly, the person before you is a child of God and needs to be treated with dignity and respect. They need to feel loved, supported and that they belong. They need the hope that is found in Jesus; a hope that does not disappoint us (Romans 5:5).

The encounter of Jesus with the blind man Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52) provides us with a noteworthy model for a pastoral response and the importance of discernment. As Jesus was leaving Jericho a large crowd had gathered around him. When Bartimaeus heard it was Jesus he shouted out and said, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus heard him through the crowd and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, "What do you

want me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Jesus does not make the encounter about himself! Jesus allows the focus to be on Bartimaeus. There is a radical openness on the part of Jesus to Bartimaeus. There is a listening of the heart. Jesus has to discern, given what Bartimaeus has said, what to do in this encounter with him. There is nothing pre-conceived or pre-packaged about this meeting. Jesus must also discern how to respond to the request. He may need to seek the help of one of his fellow collaborators. He is not alone in his ministry; the disciples are gathered with him. We too are not alone. We don't have to have all the answers. We don't have to be the one to provide the solution. We many need the assistance of others with different skill sets and expertise to help us address the needs of the child of God that is before us.

Being pastoral and responding pastorally to transgender individuals who present themselves to us is not about standard or patent responses. It is about creating welcoming encounters where the individual is truly heard and we are open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to direct us toward next steps. You are encouraged to do this work as part of a team, engaging other's experience, wisdom, and expertise, as appropriate.

ENCOUNTER

It is important to realize that students who are transgender are likely to experience "...triggers that dismiss or defile the desire to develop and belong as human beings..."²⁸ and:

- Bullying that directly results from heteronormative ideals:
 - Messages from their schools, peers, family and church that being 2SLGBTQIA+ is morally wrong, a sin and/or prohibited.
- These messages create internalized homophobia and transphobia producing shame and guilt, which has a negative impact on identity development.
- This creates the possibility of chronic trauma.²⁹

The moment of encounter will no doubt raise questions for the school staff in terms of, how do I best support this child? What is the best response when a student discloses that they are changing their gender identity? It is important to personalize our response and this can be achieved when we:

- Avoid checklist mentality.
- Recognize, celebrate, honour, take joy in the uniqueness of this, and every child.
- Acknowledge that each child, and each transgender child is wonderfully made, unique and has individual needs.
- Remain physically and emotionally present to this child and follow the lead that they offer through their responses to questions and stated needs.

As educators explore the complexities of being trauma-informed, we need to remember that trauma-informed work is a process. It doesn't require that educators do the work of mental health professionals. The educator's role in helping students with trauma is to focus on relationships, just as we do with all of our students. Strong, trusting, and nurturing relationships with our students, colleagues, and families can serve as a pathway for healing.

Asking good questions is a skill that requires practice. Good questions must also be coupled with active listening. Good questions will help to uncover challenges and needs, and can lead to innovation, growth and a personalized response. Good questions keep us learning, rather than judging. Stay curious. Advice giving and getting to a solution quickly are not always the best pathway forward.

Open ended questions can elicit answers that lead to better outcomes. Active listening requires your engagement and is often most visible through your body language. Show that you care, lean in, and using good questions, keep the dialogue going. Good questions can often be the catalyst for reflection, shift thinking, and bring about positive change.

LISTEN

Below are some sample pastoral questions you might use with 2SLGBTQIA+ members of your community.

- What is your life like?
- Where do you experience joy in your life?
- What is your experience of school?
- What is your experience of God?
- What is your experience of the church?
- How might school be a more welcoming place for you?
- How have you suffered as a result of your orientation or identity?
- What do you hope for, long for, pray for?

(Adapted from James Martin, SJ, *Building A Bridge* p. 52.)

DISCERN

- With whom might you need to have a conversation in order to ensure the necessary supports?
- What actions might be required, immediately, short, and longer term?
- When a student expresses the desire to 'come out' it is important to ask and understand: What does coming out mean to you?

What follows is a compilation of commonly asked questions from educators and considerations for an individually focussed response. In addition, the *Ontario Human Rights Commission* is an important resource. This policy aims to:

- Promote recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of trans people.
- Provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination and harassment because of gender identity and gender expression.
- Create a climate of understanding and mutual respect, so that trans people feel they belong in the community and can contribute to it.

The educator's role in helping students with trauma is to focus on relationships, just as we do with all of our students. Strong, trusting, and nurturing relationships with our students, colleagues, and families can serve as a pathway for healing.

COMMON QUESTIONS: CONSIDERATIONS

FOR AN INDIVIDUALLY FOCUSED RESPONSE

QUESTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS
<p>Am I allowed to honour a student's request for name change in the classroom?</p>	<p>The OHRC resource provides the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glossary for understanding gender identity and expression. Appendix B, p. 54-57 • Best Practices. Appendix C, p. 58-60 <p>According to developmental psychologist Erik Erikson, adolescence is a stage of identity vs. role confusion. Transgender adolescents are in the process of forming their own identity, as are all adolescents. It is important to accompany students as they progress through their journey of self-discovery.</p>
<p>My student wants to 'come out' in a presentation to the class. What do I do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First ask, what does 'coming out' mean to you? • What are the possible considerations that the student needs to reflect upon to ensure that they can give informed consent? • If you need additional support or consultation, please reach out to members of your school's student support team.
<p>What do I do if I feel uncomfortable with the name that the student is requesting (gamer, animal, etc.)?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluidity of identity — adolescence is a time of identity confusion for all. Ask yourself if you are problematizing this identity exploration for 2SLGBTQIA+ students differently than you might be for other students. • Is the family involved yet? What is the context for this choice? • The Trevor Project is the world's largest suicide prevention and crisis intervention organization for LGBTQ young people. • Egale Canada provides research, education, awareness and advocacy for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world.
<p>How do I best interact with the parents? Siblings in the same school? Additional family? Ambiguous grief?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accompany non-judgmentally. • Parents may also be going through a process of acceptance that takes time. • The Importance of Family Acceptance for LGBTQ youth in Pediatric News by Dr. Shauna M. Lawlis outlines the importance of family support. • We are accompanying the student and their family in this process. • Continual engagement is helpful, especially if the family is struggling. • <i>Parents' positive commitment and actions nurture gender health as they help their child to belong.</i> (Grace & Wells, 2015, p. 76). • Consult with your school Social Worker or your Mental Health Lead for resources available in your local community.
<p>What is the role of school based mental health professionals in supporting the student?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize when a concern is beyond your scope of practice. Include other professionals in developing a wrap-around support system. • The role of the mental health professionals is to provide a safe place for students to share/express/process their concerns, and safely discuss/question their identity and/or sexual orientation, and support the overall health and well-being of our 2SLGBTQIA+ students. • In addition, mental health professionals provide support for students experiencing challenges with bias, discrimination, harassment, rejection, etc. They work to bolster protective factors and introduce community supports where needed/necessary.

QUESTIONS

CONSIDERATIONS

I am worried that I am not upholding the Catholic faith in my support of this child. What do I do?

In the Roman Catholic community, you will find a variety of views on gender. There is an evolving understanding of the complexity of gender and sexual orientation and the appropriate pastoral response. We have an obligation to remain current in our understanding of these issues. This learning stance is encouraged through informing our conscience. Break bread/accompany/walk with 2SLGBTQIA+ students to understand their lives as a way to practice your faith. Some suggested current resources include:

- [Male and Female He Created Them: Toward a Path of Dialogue](#).
- New Directory for Catechesis, 2020.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church.
 - On informing your conscience: CCC # [1776](#), [1777-1782](#), [1783-1785](#), [1786-1789](#), [1790-1794](#), [1795-1802](#).
 - On Social Justice: CCC # [1928](#), [1929-1933](#), [1934-1938](#), [1939-1942](#), [1943-1948](#)
- *Building a Bridge* by Fr. James Martin, SJ.
- Podcast Interview with Fr. James Martin [‘You Are in a Church That is Still Learning How to Love You’](#) on CBC tapestry.

What are best practices for accommodations?

- Boards have a responsibility to consider requests for accommodation (including washrooms) in a timely manner and in good faith.
- The process may require a coordinated effort across departments in the board.
- Accessible washrooms (single person use) should include gender free signage.
- Perceived delays can often lead to conflict and misunderstanding.
- [Learning for All](#) states, “The aim of [Universal Design for Learning], then, is to provide access to the curriculum for all students, and to assist educators in designing products and environments to make them accessible to everyone, regardless of age, skills, or situation.” (p. 14).
- Some families may have concerns related to sacraments and sacramental documentation. This is an opportunity to accompany the family, and to discern which Church partner to contact, and to facilitate next steps.

To what extent can teachers address inclusive practices for 2SLGBTQIA+ students in the classroom?

This is a team approach. We need to create a culture where we engage one another in on-going professional learning. Discern the best pathway forward collaboratively to meet the needs of each student.

A NOTE ABOUT **PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

School staff are an important part of a student's circle of support. System and school leaders have a role to play in ensuring staff are clear about how to support a cohesive process to, through and from more intensive supports.

Ensure your staff is clear on the processes that are involved with the circle of support and pathways that can be activated to access more intensive supports. Your mental health leader is an important resource regarding information about the circle of support process.

Issues of privacy and access to personal information are paramount in matters concerning the mental health of students. School boards and Provincial Schools in Ontario operate within a legal environment in which various pieces of legislation govern decision making about access and privacy, including:

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) 
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) 
- Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA) 
- Education Act 

Boards and Provincial Schools have policies and procedures in place that are informed by access and privacy legislation. In addition, board legal counsel and/or Freedom of Information Coordinators can provide assistance in matters relating to protection of privacy and access to information. The following publications provide information about access and privacy legislation in the context of education:

- Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario, Privacy and Access to Information in Ontario Schools: A Guide for Educators (January 2019). 
- Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario and Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner for British Columbia, Practice Tool for Exercising Discretion: Emergency Disclosure of Personal Information by Universities, Colleges and Other Educational Institutions (2008). 

(From Supporting Minds: *An Educator's Guide to Promoting Student Mental Health and Well-Being*. 2013. p. 13)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Catholic Church and Pontificium Consilium de Nova Evangelizatione. *Directory for Catechesis*, 2020.
- ² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education*, Vatican City, 2019. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_en.pdf
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ For these and other statistics on the Ontario public education system, including Catholic schools see Ontario Human Rights Commission. "OHRC Submission Regarding the Government Consultation on the Education System in Ontario: Groups and Individuals Experiencing Discrimination in Education." *Ontario Human Rights Commission*, December 14, 2018.
- ⁵ As cited in *10 Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto
- ⁶ Queer' is often used as a positive word, but it comes out of a context that is negative. To understand when, how and if you should use this word, see: Collins, Cory. "Is Queer Ok to Say? Here's Why We Use It." *Learning for Justice*, February 11, 2019. www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/is-queer-ok-to-say-heres-why-we-use-it.
- ⁷ Callaghan, Tonya D. 2018, *Homophobia in the Hallways*, p. 209.
- ⁸ Iskander, Lee, and Abigail Shabtay. *Who Runs the Schools?: LGBTQ Youth Activism and Ontario's Bill 13*. *Journal of LGBT Youth* 15, no. 4 (October 2, 2018): p. 346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2018.1500508>.
- ⁹ Pope Francis, World Meeting of Popular Movements, 2014 as cited in *10 Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*, University of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto
- ¹⁰ Martino, Wayne, Lee Airton, Diana Kuhl, and Wendy Cumming-Potvin. *Mapping Transgender Polycsapes: A Policy Analysis of Transgender Inclusivity in the Education System in Ontario*. *Journal of Education Policy* 34, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 302–30. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2018.1478992>.
- ¹¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and Female He Created Them: Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education*, Vatican City, 2019.
- ¹² Government of Ontario. *An Act to Amend the Education Act with Respect to Bullying and Other Matters*. Ontario.ca, June 19, 2012.
- ¹³ Government of Ontario, *An Act to Amend the Education Act with Respect to Bullying and Other Matters*. 300.0.1.2.
- ¹⁴ Government of Ontario, 303.1.1 (d).
- ¹⁵ Government of Ontario, 303.1.1 (d).
- ¹⁶ Ontario Human Rights Commission. *Separate School Rights Preserved*.
- ¹⁷ Bill C-4 (Royal Assent), December 8, 2021. Subsection 164 (7) under Conversion Therapy. www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent#ID0EHAA
- ¹⁸ Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization. *Catechesis and Some Questions of Bioethics* Directory for Catechesis." July 2020, #377.
- ¹⁹ Dr. Amy Tan (2021). *Power and Privilege in Canada* page 2, paragraph 6. <https://amytanmd.files.wordpress.com/2021/06/power-privilege-in-canada-graphic-dr-amy-tan-md-1.pdf>
- ²⁰ Steinmetz, Katy. *She Coined the Term 'Intersectionality' Over 30 Years Ago. Here's What it Means to Her Today*. Time Magazine, 2020. www.time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality
- ²¹ Author bell hooks opted not to capitalize her name, hoping to keep the public's focus on her work. www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2021/12/15/bell-hooks-real-name
- ²² hooks, bell. In *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 60 public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1813115.
- ²³ Pope Benedict. *Porta Fidei*. Apostolic Letter, 2011, # 11. www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_proprio/documents/hf_ben-xvi_motu_proprio_20111011_porta-fidei.html
- ²⁴ Pope Francis. *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the National Catechetical Office of the Italian Episcopal Conference*. Bulletin of the Holy See Press Office, 30 January 2021. www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/january/documents/papa-francesco_20210130_ufficio-catechistico-cei.html
- ²⁵ For a more fulsome dialogue on these suggestions, please see. Martin, James. *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity*. Revised and Expanded edition. New York, NY: HarperOne, 2018.
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- ²⁸ Grace, André P., and Kristopher Wells. *Growing into Resilience: Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Canada*. Toronto ; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2015.
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