

· EDITORIAL ·

Catholic board misses the mark

The Halton Catholic District School Board is way off base with its ban on donations to charities that may fall foul of its interpretation of religious doctrine. The board's trustees are getting a lot of pushback on their decision, and rightly so.

Some 21,000 people have signed an online petition against it. Students are speaking out and the leader of the board's teachers union calls the ban "needlessly divisive."

Even the chair of the board, Diane Rabenda, has made it clear she personally disagrees with it.

Nonetheless, the trustees are forging ahead with this ill-advised measure. Adopted in late February, it bans fundraising or donations for non-profits and charities that "directly or indirectly" support abortion, contraception, sterilization, euthanasia or embryonic stem-cell research.

The ban is so broad that it may catch many mainstream charitable groups in its net - including the likes of the United Way, the Canadian Cancer Society (which currently isn't funding stem-cell research but has in the past and could in the future), women's shelters, the Red Cross, UNICEF and even Toronto's Sick-Kids Hospital. The board and its 33,000 students raise about \$12 million a year.

No wonder one of the students protesting this decision, 17-year-old Ben Sabourin, told a board meeting Tuesday evening: "I will not stand here and be told by this board that I am any less of a Catholic for helping sick children and cancer patients."

The trustees who voted for the ban should ask themselves a few questions.

They should wonder, for example, why none of Ontario's 28 other English Catholic school boards (or the seven French Catholic ones, for that matter) have felt it necessary to adopt such a prohibition.

They should wonder about the wisdom of adopting a ban so comprehensive that it would prohibit donations to an organization that even "indirectly" supports contraception or stem-cell research. Umbrella groups like the United Way may well be swept up in it simply because one of the organizations they fund is involved in something as innocuous as family planning.

Beyond all that, a publicly funded school board should not be trying to ban charitable giving on the basis of a few trustees' strict interpretation of religious doctrine. Aside from being wrong, it will only fuel opposition to the whole idea of separate Catholic boards.

The Halton Catholic board has been down this rocky road before, and it has always led to a dead end.

The board refused for five years to allow girls to receive the HPV vaccine in school, arguing it sent a "mixed message on chastity." And it tried to ban "gay-straight alliances" until protests forced it to change its mind.

This is another wrong-headed decision. The board should re-think it without delay.



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· LETTERS & COMMENTARY ·

Do Catholics not have a right to make a choice?

Do the pundits who believe the Halton Catholic District School Board is out of line with its pro-life motion not see the irony in their opposition?

Does not pro-choice mean freedom to choose? Is the Halton board not free to choose what it believes is the right choice: protection of the unborn?

Do Catholics not contribute to the public purse and have the right to allocate their proportional contributions to promote positions they believe conform to Church teaching? Do they not have the right to choose to direct their charitable donations to organizations that support

Catholic principles?

Or do we live in a totalitarian state, where one segment of society gets to dictate what happens to the public funding provided by Catholics?

Do we live in a society where pro-choice really means no choice at all? Are the opponents to this issue attempting to deny Catholics their constitutional freedom to choose?

Peter Swirzon

It's time to pull the plug on Facebook

The drop in stock market prices is now being attributed to Facebook's value or lack of value.

Why is my retirement fund taking a drop because of Facebook which is designed to keep you in contact with people you don't

know or don't want to and show you ads for products you didn't know you needed?

There should not have been a surprise that a company such as data firm Cambridge Analytica was a user of Facebook that collected, collated and considered and potentially corrupted the political system.

It's time to face the truth and turn Facebook off so that we can live our own lives and not an online one.

Dennis Fitzgerald

Writer raps HCDSB fundraising decision

I am absolutely appalled by the most recent decision made by the trustees of the Halton Catholic District School Board to ban fundraising for charities that indirectly violate Catholic

values.

This ban could include organizations such as Sick-Kids, Me to We, and even the Terry Fox Run.

I support the petition started by the students and hopefully the parents. However, there is more that we can do to demonstrate our displeasure.

Right now I have the paperwork in front of me and although we have been long supporters of this school board, with our own children attending Catholic schools, we are sadly on the verge of withdrawing our financial support as we cannot in good conscience tacitly condone this.

We are waiting and watching the board's response to the growing backlash of this very unwise and narrow thinking motion.

Marika Costa

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