

Some parents angry as non-Catholics excluded

By KIM ARNOTT
Special to The Champion

A decision by Halton separate school board trustees to ban non-Catholics from school councils will do more to damage the Catholic school system than protect it, says one angry parent.

"This board has done more to harm its future than to help it," said Brad McKay, moments after trustees voted seven to five to approve the new policy. "If they don't have room for parents I don't think they have a viable system," said the Burlington parent.

Mr. McKay, a non-Catholic parent with two children in the separate system, wanted the right to sit on the councils which will soon take over some decision-making power at local schools.

An initiative of the provincial government, the council intent is to involve parents, teachers, students and community members in

the school decision-making process.

"It's not just those of the Catholic faith who have a stake in this board," Mr. McKay told trustees.

But several trustees expressed concern that allowing non-Catholics to sit on the councils could weaken the entire system and eventually result in the downfall of separate education.

"I don't feel that any one person is going to undermine our system, but I do know that in the near future our system is going to be challenged," said Oakville Trustee Maggie Jessup Natale.

But Father Ronald Cote, a Burlington trustee and priest, argued that allowing Mr. McKay and other non-Catholics onto the councils would help build a united Catholic community, not threaten it.

Of the 373 marriages which took place in Halton parishes in 1994, 42 per cent were mixed-faith marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics, noted Father Cote.

HOW THEY VOTED:

For the policy:	Against the policy:
Mary Lou Loughlin (Milton)	Father Ronald Cote (Burl)
Ed Viana (Oak)	Alice Anne LeMay (Oak)
Maggie Jessup Natale (Oak)	Kevin O'Connor (Oak)
Joe Deoni (Milton)	Pat Weber (Burl)
Krys Binkley (Burl)	Gerry O'Halloran (Oak)
Genevieve Dowson (Burl)	
Don Schrenk (Oak)	

He estimated that 40-50 per cent of the board's students come from a household where only one parent is Catholic.

"We teach the children to respect both parents and I think we need to do that," he said.

Janette Nosella, a Catholic parent with children at Ascension school, expressed dismay at the board's decision.

"Let's move on with how our society has changed. I don't think that means the destruction of the Catholic faith," she said.

Describing the decision to exclude non-Catholics as judgmental, intolerant and archaic, Ms Nosella suggested the board should consider excluding Catholics who don't attend church regularly.

But trustees did hear from one Burlington parent who supports the all-Catholic policy.

Gloria Lagace, co-president of the Church-Parent-Teacher Association at St. Mark's school, said that the vast majority of parents at that school are in favor of keeping councils completely Catholic.

"Sometimes decisions have to be made for the betterment of the whole and not just the few," she argued.

Mr. McKay says he is still considering his next move, but doesn't intend to give up the fight against the policy yet. He says he may contact provincial and education ministry officials about the board's decision, which he sees as clearly discriminatory.

"Many of (the trustees), I don't think, know the meaning of discrimination," he said.

While non-Catholic parents will be excluded from sitting on school councils under the new policy, they will be allowed to take part in committees which report back to the council.

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