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DPCDSB trustees vote against raising Pride flag

Written By **Sam Odrowski**

June is Pride Month and rainbow flag raisings have been taking place at buildings for non-profit and government organizations across the region.

But a rainbow flag will not be raised at Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board schools and facilities.

DPCDSB trustees voted 6-3 against allowing flags related to Pride and other observances to be hoisted at flagpoles located on board-owned properties during a meeting on June 11.

The only flags that are allowed to be flown at board properties are the Canadian flag, the Province of Ontario flag and flags associated with the liturgical year.

DPCDSB trustee for Dufferin¬?Caledon Paula Dametto-Giovannozzi, who voted against the motion allowing a rainbow flag at board facilities, shared her stance on the issue at the June 11 meeting.

?The LGBTQ+ community is not our enemy. We all fall short of God's glory. We are not judging, but we are also not promoting. We don't want to outwardly promote because our faith doesn't allow us to. We are called to love all people, whatever their beliefs are. We are not discriminating against anyone,? said Dametto-Giovannozzi.

?There is only one symbol that should be promoted by a Christian, and that is the cross. No other symbol has any importance to a Christian and under the banner of the cross, we do embrace and love our LGBTQ+ friends. Not promoting something doesn't mean we are against it. A Catholic school board should not promote any political or cultural beliefs that is not biblical.?

Brea Corbet, DPCDSB trustee for Mississauga Wards 9 and 10, spoke in support of flying the rainbow flag for Pride Month.

?We must reflect on whether we as a Catholic school board are doing enough to combat discrimination, homophobia, intolerance, and hate. All are welcome in our Catholic schools. That does not mean only some. Jesus surrounded himself with the most marginalized of his society. God loves everyone,? said Corbet at the June 11 DPCDSB meeting.

?Understanding that our students, families and staff of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community continue to experience increasing levels of bullying, harassment, and mental health concerns. We have an obligation as a board to ensure our Catholic schools are welcoming safe and inclusive spaces in support of student achievement, and the academic success of all learners.?

Corbet noted that DPCDSB schools are already permitted to display rainbow-coloured flags inside their buildings during the Pride month observation period and are already doing so. She clarified that the motion, which trustees struck down later in the meeting, was to allow additional flags, including rainbow flags, to be flown at the board office and DPCDSB buildings where there is more than one flagpole.

?It does not, and by way of this motion, will not replace the Canadian flag that currently flies outside our schools,? Corbet said.

Herman Viloria, trustee for Mississauga Wards 2 and 8, said he agrees with much of what Corbet said but finds flying the rainbow flag to be ?very problematic.?

Vilora said while it is a sensitive and complex issue, it is crucial to approach it with clarity and respect for Catholic values.

?First and foremost, we must remember the core mission of a Catholic school board [is] to educate and nurture students in a manner

consistent with Catholic teachings. The Catholic Church's teachings on human dignity and sexuality are clear and well established. While the church recognizes the inherent dignity of every individual, regardless of their sexual orientation, it maintains specific teachings on marriage and sexuality that do not align with a broader social movement often associated with the pride flag,? said Viloria.

?The pride flag, while a symbol of inclusion and acceptance for many, also represents ideologies and practices that contradict catholic doctrine. The Church teaches that marriage is a sacrament between one man and one woman, and that sexual activity is reserved for this union. The pride flag, however, often stands for normalization of same sex relationships, and a broader acceptance of diverse sexual practices, which conflict with these teachings.?

Over 16,000 people signed a petition by CitizenGO asking DPCDSB trustees to not raise the Pride flag. The petition says, ?Raising the Pride flag would betray Catholic values and beliefs ? the very values and beliefs that elected school board trustees at a Catholic school board are tasked to defend and promote throughout Catholic schools.?

The petition continues, ?The LGBT lifestyle is directly at odds with Catholic teachings, beliefs, and values.?

There were three delegations from pro-life and conservative advocacy groups and two from private citizens at the June 11 DPCDSB meeting. All of the delegates spoke against the flying of Pride flags at DPCDSB schools.

The delegates said they feel everyone is included under the symbol of the cross, and there's no need to use other symbols to make students feel included.

?It is because I deeply love those who misguidedly identify as LGBTQ that I so strongly reject the pride flag and the ideology that it propagates,? said Josie Luetke, director of education advocacy for Campaign Life Coalition.

A couple of delegates cited comments made by Cardinal Thomas Collins in 2021, where he said, ?The appropriate symbol that represents our faith, and the inclusion and acceptance of others is the cross.?

?Practically, we also know that there are any number of groups working to advocate for many diverse causes. For this reason, many school boards wisely fly only the Canadian flag out of a sense of equity for all,? Cardinal Collins continued.

?There is a belief among some that unless one embraces secular symbols, one cannot be inclusive or accepting. This is simply not true. Where there are cases of injustice and mistreatment of any student whether they are bullied or rejected due to their sexual orientation, appearance, race, sex or any other reason, we must seize the moment to address the situation and ensure that we lead by example. As we foster a culture of care and love for every individual, that truth is perfectly represented in our most fundamental Catholic symbol ? the cross.?

Jim Waddington, the founder of Dufferin's LGBTQ advocacy group Celebrate Your Awesome, described the board's decision to not fly a rainbow flag as appalling.

?It's a simple gesture of goodwill and support,? he said of rainbow flag raisings. ?The bottom line for the flag, as it was started years ago, the original march, if you will, was a protest. They were fighting for rights; they were fighting for some freedom. All anybody wants is a is a seat at the table and to be heard, to have a voice, and let's face it, we all want to be wanted, we all want to have some kindness given to us, and the pride flag, rainbow flag is a symbol of that. ?

Waddington made note of Pope Francis's comments in 2023 when he called for an end to anti-gay laws and said people in the LGBTQ community should be welcomed into Catholic churches. The pope also said bishops need to recognize the dignity of everyone.

?I think that's a keyword ? dignity,? said Waddington, who added that students belonging to the LGBTQ community will feel less

welcome in their places of learning following the board's decision.

He said he fears students will turn to drug use, or worse ? suicide ? due to a lack of support and recognition of their identity.

?How about we educate the board,? Waddington suggested. ?Because the board is certainly not educating the students.?

Orangeville Mayor Lisa Post noted that while she has no jurisdiction over local school boards, the vote against flying a Pride flag is a missed opportunity for DPCDSB.

?This publicly funded entity had the opportunity to promote inclusion and show that their schools are safe spaces for all ? inclusive of their 2SLGBTQIA+ students and they missed that chance,? she said. ?What was more troubling than the actual decision however, is the viral video showing cheers from the gallery following the vote. This sends a very strong message to 2SLGBTQIA+ students that their presence and identities are not fully accepted or supported, which undermines the sense of safety and inclusion that every student at every school deserves to have.?

There are a handful of elementary schools in Orangeville represented by the DPCDSB. They include St. Benedict Catholic School, St. Andrew Catholic School and St. Peter Catholic School.

While there is no catholic high school in Dufferin County, some students in the area commute to Robert F. Hall in Caledon.