

# **Social Justice: Inspiring Active Citizenship in Catholic Education**

Report of the Catholic Board Council of the  
Ontario Student Trustees' Association- l'Association  
des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	3
Letter from the President.....	4
Preface.....	5
Premise.....	5
The Responsible Citizen.....	6
The Inclusion of Social Justice in Religious Education.....	7
Recommendations.....	7
Our Call to Action.....	8
Appendix.....	9

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Social Justice Report was compiled through the efforts of the executive members of the Catholic Board Council of two terms, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011.

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Discussions of the entire Catholic Board Council were conducted on four separate occasions - our Fall General Meeting 2009, Board Council Conferences 2010, Annual General Meeting 2010 and Fall General Meeting 2010- in order to gain an accurate representation of the views of Catholic Student Trustees from across the province. Further work was accomplished through a number of electronic meetings thereafter. A special thanks is extended to all of the student trustees who provided their opinions, commentary, and resources that were integral to the completion of this report.

We hope that this report offers insight as to how students recognize social justice as a key component of active Catholicism, and is reflective of the Catholic Graduate Expectation to, “promote equality, democracy, solidarity, for a just, peaceful, and compassionate society.” This expectation encompasses the nature of social justice initiatives and their link to religious education.

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Ministry of Education, Catholic stakeholders and Catholic school boards of Ontario,

It is with great pride that I present to you the latest instalment of publications from the Catholic Board Council of OSTA-AECO. The report is entitled “Social Justice: Inspiring Active Citizenship in Catholic Education” and provides a student perspective on how Catholic schools across Ontario can further promote social awareness and activeness amongst their students. The report includes practical recommendations and valuable student opinions pertaining to the implementation of social justice initiatives and the development of a justice-oriented attitude in schools.

As students in the Catholic school system, we are raised with morals that promote equal treatment and rights for all human beings, created in the likeness of God. We are taught to foster an attitude of acceptance and bred to heed the sanctity and equality of all human life. Why, then, is it so difficult at times to take a stand in the face of injustice that is so prevalent in the modern world? As stakeholders and active participants in Catholic education in Ontario, it is our call to action to help students realize their potential to serve in a Christ-like manner and respond to the instances of injustice around them. Youth today are empowered more than ever to positively impact society, and it is our role to facilitate that drive and provide them with the best foundation on which they will build a structure of social responsiveness. It is integral that our curriculum continues to promote active citizenship, both locally and globally, through making social justice inspired by Christ a significant component to religious education. Every one of us is created equal and therefore deserving of integrity and welfare that are upheld. We as Catholics must join in the fight for human dignity that extends beyond geographical, political and socio-economic borders.

It is the hope of the Catholic Board Council that you find this report inspiring and that it will be used to spark awareness and, more importantly, stimulate positive progression.

Yours in Catholic Education,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivia Suppa". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Olivia Suppa  
Catholic Board Council President, 2010-2011

## **PREFACE**

Catholic students are called by the Ministry of Education and their faith to embody specific characteristics in order to graduate from a Catholic high school. The Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations outline the type of citizen we are expected to be and the way in which we are to apply our religious education to everyday life. It is because of such expectations that we are called to be collaborative thinkers, life-long learners, and responsible citizens who embody the teachings of Catholicism.

In consultation with student trustees from across the province, it became apparent that, “living out [their] faith” was a common theme among the majority. Social justice initiatives are just one of the ways that students from across Ontario are living out their faith and sparking positive change in their communities and beyond. Discussion yielded an opinion amongst student trustees regarding the current religious curriculum. They believe that integrating an “active” component to the course directly linked to social justice would be beneficial to both students and the community at large. A faith-based school builds a religious atmosphere in all classes, and students think that this atmosphere should, “extend to the community too.”

The Catholic Board Council of OSTA-AECO believes that the fight for Social Justice is an important component of the education of the whole person. “Students should not be sheltered to the injustices occurring in the world but should rather be enlightened and encouraged to apply their knowledge in order to stimulate positive change,” says a member of the CBC. Students, now more than ever, realize this overwhelming need in our world, and desire to make things better. They realize that they are the students of today, but the leaders of tomorrow. They realize that change begins with them.

## **PREMISE**

The premise for our report is to foster a sense of understanding concerning social justice initiatives from across the province and reveal how the fight for equality directly relates to Catholic education. This report will present several recommendations given by students in order to enhance the “active” component of our Catholic education and provide a platform for students to initiate positive change in their community and beyond. Students recognize that their religious education extends beyond the walls of the classroom and provides the foundation for their lives as citizens. In order to be active citizens, students must care not only for themselves, but for others as well. Social justice initiatives instil this principle in the lives of students during their youth and provide for them the foundation on which they will ignite positive progression in their own lives and those of others. Additions to the religious curriculum will ensure that youth recognize the calling to make positive and favourable contributions to today’s society, and act on it.

## THE RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN

Outlined in the Ontario Catholic Graduates Expectations, a responsible citizen is one who:

- Acts morally and legally as a person formed in Catholic traditions
- Accepts accountability for one's own actions
- Seeks and grants forgiveness
- Promotes the sacredness of life
- Witnesses Catholic social teaching by promoting equality, democracy, and solidarity for a just, peaceful and compassionate society
- Respects and affirms the diversity and interdependence of the world's peoples and cultures
- Respects and understands the history, cultural heritage and pluralism of today's contemporary society
- Exercises the rights and responsibilities of Canadian citizenship
- Respects the environment and uses resources wisely
- Contributes to the common good

The current Catholic education system provides the foundation on which Catholic students cement their futures. Our education system is one that encompasses the teachings of our faith and promotes that these principles and teachings extend beyond the classroom in accordance with the Catholic Graduate Expectations. However, many students feel that the current religion curriculum would be enhanced with an "active" component, one that is based on our call to act as responsible stewards of humanity. As responsible citizens, we are called to contribute to the betterment of our society and the common good. We are beckoned to respect others and support the interdependence of the world's population. A way in which many students choose to contribute to this "common good", both in their own communities and abroad, are through the work of various organizations that fight for social justice (see Appendix). The Catholic Board Council encourages school boards to do the same with their religious education curricula, so that students may live their faith actively, achieve their Catholic Graduate Expectations, and grow into a responsible citizen both in and out of the classroom.

# **THE INCLUSION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

The Catholic Board Council encourages that local and global initiatives, outreach programs and positions related to social justice be included in religious education in the classroom, as well as integrated into the cultural life of the school community. As stated in the recommendations, this can be achieved through establishing strong ties with local parishes and participating in community outreach either through school initiatives or those of the parish. An atmosphere of social awareness can be created through projects taken on by student councils or committees that contribute funds, assistance or support to local or global organizations. Ultimately, schools should be prompted to create student groups oriented completely toward social justice initiatives. Students should be encouraged to take leadership roles in their communities by fostering this kind of Chris-like outlook and participating actively in school or community initiatives that reach out to others.

On a larger scale, school boards can set an example of Catholic leadership in affiliating with organizations in the business of securing human rights and justice for all. School boards may also desire to implement certain policies that are in keeping with current global social justice initiatives; doing so would be innovative and inspiring for its student population. Most importantly, however, social justice must have a resounding undertone in Catholic curriculum. Through collective service-work and education both in and out of the classroom, facilitated by schools, students will gain insight into the realm of injustice and collaboratively aspire to address it. Responding to injustices is a display of a fundamental principle of religious education, and that is service. Social justice can therefore be effectively implemented into curriculum by tying it in with service projects and outreach experiences, some of which are already present in religion classes or other courses. Active citizenship and responsive action are instrumental to the creation of a well-rounded, moral, Catholic citizen, and continuing to put emphasis on social justice in our schools will aid in shaping these kinds of citizens.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. OSTA-AECO recommends that all religion courses strive to foster the uniqueness of their existence by collectively partaking in additional community service opportunities outside the classroom each year to contribute to the forty hour service requirement.
2. OSTA-AECO recommends that a social justice committee exist in each Catholic high school within Ontario for the benefit of the school as well as the greater

community. It is also recommended that staff and administration support social outreach initiatives and provide necessary aid where needed.

3. OSTA-AECO recommends that school chaplains maintain a distinct presence and link to the school parish while actively assisting the social justice committee and other student leadership groups and what they strive to advocate, where necessary.
4. OSTA-AECO recommends that school boards work with various companies and organizations (refer to appendix) to strive for social justice locally and globally, beginning with each individual student.
5. OSTA-AECO recommends that an annual religious retreat is implemented into the curriculum of each high school year to enrich the ethical experience of each student and instil a sense of social responsibility within their individual educational journey.
6. OSTA-AECO recommends that school boards implement a Sweatshop-Free purchasing policy that will include a requirement of full public disclosure and independent third party monitoring, from companies and organizations such as the *Workers Rights Consortium* to promote, advance and protect the just cause of the poor and the marginalized.
7. OSTA-AECO recommends that Catholic high schools make monetary contributions to selected charities with the funds generated from non-uniform issued days and other special days designated for fundraising.
8. OSTA-AECO recommends that school boards discourage the use of plastic bottles by promoting the use of public drinking facilities, personal canteens and other alternatives due to the negative economical, environmental, and social implications associated with plastic bottles.

## **OUR CALL TO ACTION**

The teachings of Christ call us out of ourselves and wake us from our selfishness to attend to the plights of others. It is our call to action not to be blind. It is our call to utilize our resources, our education and our God-given gifts to bring justice and integrity to those who plead for it. Above all, it is our call to love our neighbour. Jesus tells us in Mark 10:44-45 “and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all, ‘For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’” Catholic leadership starts at home—in the school and in the



community. Let us live as Jesus wanted though nurturing the growth of Catholic leadership, and through opening our eyes and hearts to serve the victims of injustices in our communities, our country and our world.

## **APPENDIX**

The following is a list that includes non-governmental organizations in Ontario and throughout Canada that promote various social justice causes locally, nationally and globally. The Catholic Board Council of OSTA-AECO encourages that school boards and students regard this appendix as they search for groups to become affiliated with during the execution of their own social justice initiatives.

- Alzheimer Society
- Amnesty International
- Big Sisters/Big Brothers
- Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace
- Canadian Cancer Society
- Canadian Diabetes Association
- Canadian Food For Children
- Canadian Food for Life
- Canadian Red Cross Society
- Canada Without Poverty
- Catholic Charities
- Covenant House
- FOTOCAN: Friends of the Orphans Canada
- Free the Children
- Habitat for Humanity
- Heart and Stroke Foundation
- House of Sophrosyne
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (M.A.D.D.)
- L'Arche Canada
- Ontario Coalition Against Poverty
- Royal Canadian Legion
- Salvation Army
- Sharelife
- The National Anti-Poverty Organization
- UNICEF
- United Way
- Wells of Hope
- War Child
- World Vision
- Workers' Rights Consortium

The following outlines various charitable organizations that take on social justice causes locally, nationally and globally, specific to the four regions in Ontario. Its purpose is to aid students in their quest for enriching community service, and provide a reference for schools and boards who seek organizations to support in their regions.

<b>REGION</b>	<b>CHARITABLE NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS</b>
Northern	Algoma Residential Community Hospice (A.R.C.H.) Because I'm a Girl Bicycles for Humanity Boys and Girls Club of Thunder Bay Camp Quality Canadian Mental Health Association Thunder Bay Branch Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Catholic Family Development Centre Children's Aid Society of the District of Thunder Bay Children's Centre Thunder Bay Community Cancer Clinic Community Living Algoma Dew Drop-In Dilico Children's Foundation Easter Seals Eco Superior Elizabeth Fry Society of Northwestern Ontario Evergreen: A United Neighbourhood Faye Peterson Transition House Fibromyalgia Association of Sault Ste. Marie Algoma District Friends of Olivia Foundation Garden River First Nation Community Trust George Jeffrey Children's Centre Group Health Centre Trust Fund HAGI Harbour Youth Services Health Science Discovery Fund Hope for Malawi Hospice Northwest John Howard Society Kidney Foundation Lung Association Leadership Thunder Bay Macular Degeneration Magnus Theatre Mental Health Sault Ste. Marie Multiple Sclerosis Society of Algoma MS Society of Thunder Bay Neech-Ke-Wehn Homes Native Housing Neurofibromatosis Society of Ontario New Hope Youth Centre Northern Cancer Fund Northern Cardiac Fund Ontario Finnish Rest home Association Operation Hope Our Kids Count

	<p>P.R.O. Kids  Regional Food Distribution Association  Sault Area Hospital Foundation (S.A.H.F.)  Sault Ste. Marie Humane Society  Shelter House  Sister Margaret Smith Centre  Soup Kitchen of Sault Ste. Marie  St. Joseph's Foundation of Thunder Bay  St. Vincent's Place  TBCDSB Awards Trust Fund  Thunder Bay Community Foundation  Thunder Bay &amp; District Humane Society  Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre  Thunder Bay Multicultural Association  Thunder Bay Regional Health Science Centre  Volunteer Thunder Bay  Wesway</p>
South-Western	<p>ALS Society of Windsor-Essex County  Community Crisis Center of Windsor-Essex County  Downtown Mission of Windsor Inc.  Drouillard Place  Homeless Coalition of Windsor-Essex County  Iris House of Windsor  New Beginnings  Safe'n'Sound Owen Sound  Sandwich Community Health Centre Inc.  Sister Christine's Welcome Drop-in Centre  Teen Health Centre  The Inn of Windsor  T2B (Transition to Betterness)  W.E. Care for Kids  Windsor-Essex Low Income Families Together  Windsor Y Residence</p>
Golden Horseshoe	<p>ACCESS Charity  Angel Foundation for Learning  Aurora Lions Club  Community Care Outreach Niagara Homelessness Initiative  Consolata Missionaries  Cor Unum  ETA Vaughan Women's Shelter  Good Shepherd  Holy Childhood Association Roman Catholic Mission  Kairos  Karitas  Kids Helping Kids/Niagara Peninsula Children's Centre  Knights' Table  Nazareth House  Niagara Optimist Club  Nova House Women's Shelter  Partnership Walks  Project Share  Sleeping Children  St. Francis Table</p>

	Vita Centre War child
Eastern	Action Housing Brock Mission Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa Christie Lake Kids Community Development Council of Quinte CPAN (Child Poverty Action Network) Distress Centre Durham Daybreak Housing DR Experiences Grandview Children's Centre Help the Aged Canada (HTAC) HOPE Inter Pares Justice and Peace Commission of the Archdiocese of Kingston Kanata Food Cupboard Loving Spoonful Mission of Tears Multifaith Housing Initiative New Canadian Center NewStart Institute Operation Christmas Child Oshawa Youth Refuge Out Of the Cold Partners in Mission Food Bank Shepherds of Good Hope St. Vincent de Paul Food bank St. Vincent De Paul Soup Kitchen The Ottawa Food Bank The Ottawa Mission The Snowsuit Fund The Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul Windreach Farm Winter Warmth Youth Emergency Shelter Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa

NOTE: This is not a complete list of every not-for-profit organization in Ontario. It is merely a suggestive compilation of potential charities and efforts for students and school boards to become involved with.