



## **RECOGNIZING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF STUDENTS AND STAFF IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

As Catholic teachers, we strive every day to live the Gospel values for our students. Chief among these is the foundational belief that every one of us is a child of God. And that each of us has innate dignity that deserves to be recognized and respected.

But it is not enough to simply profess an abstract belief in human dignity – or pay it lip service. The Catholic Social Teachings require us to go further, and to advocate for those who may feel marginalized. We truly believe that living this Gospel value of inclusion is at the very heart of what it means to be a Catholic.

Parents and teachers are painfully aware of the consequences of the negation of the “being” of any student, for whatever reason. Depression, isolation, self-harm, and psychological difficulties are the plight of many students in our schools, and they are magnified in the lives of our students who are gender non-conforming, transgender, lesbian, gay, transitioning, or questioning.

We know that when parents come to school with their child, they have the expectation that their child will be loved, cared for, and returned home safely at the end of each school day. Many parents have children who are transitioning or transgender. They beg us to care for them, teach them, and to keep them alive until graduation.

As Catholic teachers in the publicly funded education system, we have a broader role to foster awareness and respect, prepare students for the modern world, and give everyone entrusted to our care the tools and knowledge to manage their relationships and personal wellbeing. By creating safe and welcoming learning and working environments for all students, teachers, and education workers, we are able to advance the causes of equity and human rights.

This is all the more important in the school environment. If part of our goal is to prepare students to become engaged, productive, and responsible global citizens, we must ensure not only that students are aware of human rights, but also that they accept responsibility for protecting their rights and the rights of others. We have the opportunity to lead by example.