



A Glimpse of Our Future

As the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario celebrates its tenth anniversary since becoming an independent provincial association, it is important to review two recent events that will have a significant impact on the future of this organization. In June 2007 the Supreme Court of Canada gave its decision on the British Columbia Health Workers' case. The Supreme Court made a landmark ruling that section 2.d of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees the right to associate for the purposes of collective bargaining. In September 2007 Ontario voters watched a provincial election campaign focus squarely on one issue – the funding of faith-based schools.

How are these events significant to CPCO? The answer lies in our letters patent. CPCO was incorporated in 1998 with two objects. The primary object is to represent and assist principals and vice-principals with respect to the maintenance and improvement of their terms and conditions of employment. The second object is to advance the cause of Catholic education in Ontario. Accordingly, the B.C. Health Workers' case and the Ontario election are directly related to the objects and future work of CPCO.

In September 2007 the three Ontario principals' councils (CPCO, OPC and ADFO) commissioned a legal review of the Supreme Court decision. The legal review stated the following:

Effective June 8, 2007, the Charter enshrines the right of Principals to join together in associations and to expect from School Boards a good faith collective bargaining process regarding their terms and conditions of employment. Section 2.d of the Charter now provides enforceable constitutional protection against 'substantial interference' with the Principals' associational activity of collective bargaining.

Upon receiving the legal review the three councils determined the importance of taking a constructive approach in the dissemination of this information with their respective members and with the directors of education. To that end the councils met with CODE representatives in early November to discuss the legal review. CPCO presented the information to the Council of District Representatives in late November.

Meanwhile the CPCO Member Security committee continues its preparation for the annual Employment Services Seminar in January 2008. The committee has planned to focus on developing positive relationships with senior staff. Despite the guarantee for collective bargaining, the goal remains to improve terms and conditions in a non-adversarial manner. This goal is a great opportunity for principals in Ontario to apply an integrative approach to bargaining.

The Supreme Court decision will have a direct impact on CPCO services. The membership will need more support to prepare for

negotiations with their employers. This will require an updating of our contract information systems, an increase in human resources both inside CPCO and from other professional and legal organizations, and training for local negotiation teams. Major plans have been mounted by the Member Security Committee for August 2008 to deal with some of the issues.

Now let us turn to the Ontario election. John Tory's campaign plan to study funding for other faith-based schools brought daily attacks from his political opponents. Although publicly funded for more than 150 years, the Catholic school system did not escape the spotlight in the debate on funding of other religious schools. Daily letters to the editor provided heated exchanges between those who defended our system and those who called for its end. Even the moderate letters hinted that our system would eventually be subsumed by the changing demographics of the province.

The Ontario election demonstrated the potential for continuing attacks on our system. While we can draw solace from the public statements of the major parties who continue to support our system, it is also possible that positions can change as leaders change. Within those parties there are politicians who question the continuation of our system. It is entirely possible that the next election will provide another opportunity to debate the funding of our Catholic school system.

Ontario's Catholic educators are aware that Quebec and Newfoundland gave up their Catholic school systems. However, we are less aware of the situation in other provinces. The national agenda is advancing through the efforts of the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association. Our provincial interests are safeguarded through our strong provincial associations representing the bishops, trustees, teachers, parents, students, supervisory officers, directors and principals. Ontario has strong Catholic organizations with historical and political roots and we have a productive relationship with the national leadership.

The defence of Catholic education is the top priority in our new five year strategic plan. CPCO will have a key role working with the other associations at the provincial level. CPCO will be instrumental in preparing principals and vice-principals to provide and to develop leadership in their communities. It will be incumbent on this organization to enhance its efforts in government relations and to provide professional training for its membership, which changes by more than 200 people each year. CPCO must also continue to improve its interpersonal and technological opportunities for communication and collaboration among members and with our partners. The future of Catholic education is in our own hands.