

Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board trustees vote against raising Pride flag

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-Giovanozzi, 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-Giovanozzi.

"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 LGBTQIA+ 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."

Viloria 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 Vioria.

“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.”

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