

On Flags

by SHERALYN ROMAN

As you read this column, today marks the start of PRIDE month, a month which I believe at its core, is simply asking us to be human. To be kind. To be decent. To accept one another for who we are as individuals. It also suggests that we consider raising a flag. A simple piece of rainbow coloured material that for some has actually become nothing more than a huge RED flag ? a flag representing hate rather than its original purpose representing peace, love and acceptance.

Now we all know that flags are raised for many reasons: countries raise their flag to denote who they are as a people and to proudly share their collective history, sports teams have flags for supporters to waive madly in celebration, organizations raise flags in recognition of significant occasions or to raise awareness about certain causes and finally, a white flag is the universal symbol of surrender. Flags have always been meaningful but increasingly, it's the meaning behind flags that has me concerned for our humanity.

Let's delve into this recent controversy surrounding the flying of the pride flag, specifically at publicly-funded Catholic schools. Catholic school boards across the province are grappling with the ?difficult? decision to demonstrate a safe, welcoming environment for all students, including those who identify as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. They are being asked to raise the pride flag in a show of support and understanding; of inclusivity and in simple recognition. Nothing else. It seems such a simple ask and yet, at the DPCDSB's recent trustee meeting to address the issue, the irony of the chairperson's opening message to attendees seemed lost on many of those sitting around the decision-making table.

The Chair and Trustees asked attendees to acknowledge Portuguese Heritage Month, Italian Heritage Month and National Indigenous History Month (and if anyone has a fractured history with a designated group it's the Catholic church and their treatment of Indigenous persons) but pointedly left out any reference to acknowledge or recognize June as Pride Month. Why such willingness to acknowledge so many other groups but also specifically exclude others?

I attended the meeting as a person interested in the outcome. I attended as someone who is a Catholic, a parent, and a person who whole-heartedly believes in safe, inclusive schools for every student. I attended because I believe (and was willing to run in the last two elections and take action - not just complain on social media) that the Catholic school system has an opportunity to lead the way in creating a future that recognizes publicly funded education is the cornerstone of democracy.

They have the opportunity to recognize that making education accessible for everyone regardless of how they identify is the responsibility of both school systems. Whether in a Catholic school or a Public school, the funds flow from the taxpayer and are meant to support student learning, period. In Catholic high schools that means you will see students of every faith (many of whom don't actually believe in Jesus) learning alongside those who passionately believe that Jesus Christ is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. No one seems to have a problem with that. But ask them to fly a flag in recognition of the student who believes in Jesus but might also be queer? That appears to be a hard ?No.?

What really irks me the most about this issue however, is not the debate about the flag - debate is healthy, it's another one of those cornerstones of democracy. No, it's the lack of debate from SOME Catholics who consider themselves Christians but then proceed to engage in hateful, derogatory and downright shameful remarks - comments that are in no way the hallmark of the religion they profess to practice.

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