

Group urges parents to keep kids out of new religion class

Loss of Christian education feared. 'Ethics' course to be mandatory in schools

JEFF HEINRICH

The Gazette

Saturday, April 26, 2008

Fearing that Quebec primary and high-school students will soon be deprived of a basic Christian education, a coalition of Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Copts is urging parents to demand their children be exempt from the province's mandatory new "ethics and religious culture" course.

The course - required of the close to one million pupils in the province's public and private schools, from Grade 1 to Grade 11, starting in September - goes against the principle of parents' freedom of choice in their children's education, the Coalition pour la liberté en Éducation says.

The group has printed a one-page "Application for Exemption of a Student" form that parents can submit to their child's school board, with instructions on how to appeal if the application is refused. The form can be downloaded from the coalition's website, www.coalition-cle.org To keep track of the applications, the Christian coalition - which describes itself as a grassroots group of volunteers with no church or government funding - is encouraging parents to fax it copies of the completed forms as well as the responses.

At a Montreal news conference, representatives of the coalition defined themselves by denomination. The group's president is Roman Catholic; its vice-president is Evangelical. They were flanked by the president of Greater Montreal Orthodox Coptic Community Association and a Presbyterian sociologist.

Publicizing a demonstration being organized for May 3 in Sherbrooke, coalition leaders laid out their objections to the new course, saying they'd be happier if no religious instruction were given in schools, rather than one that is bound to "confuse" students in their beliefs.

The new course is described in detail on the Quebec Education Department website, www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/ecr

In the class, students will "learn about the important place of Catholicism and Protestantism in Quebec's religious heritage, discover the contributions of Judaism and native spiritualities to this religious heritage, and learn about elements of other religious traditions more recently found in Quebec society" - like Islam and Hinduism.

At present, 73 per cent of children in Quebec primary schools and 57 per cent in high schools take a class specifically in the Catholic religion; about three per cent take instruction in Protestantism. Another 10 to 20 per cent take a more general "moral education" class. About four per cent opt out entirely.

[jheinrich@ thegazette.canwest.com](mailto:jheinrich@thegazette.canwest.com)

© The Gazette (Montreal) 2008