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COMITÉ SUR LES AFFAIRES RELIGIEUSES

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November 7, 2003

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November 7, 2003

Mr Pierre Reid
Minister of Education
1035, rue De La Chevrotière, 16^e étage
Québec (Québec) G1R 5A5

Dear Sir:

On behalf of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses, I am pleased to submit this annual report. In accordance with section 477.27 of the *Education Act*, the report documents the work accomplished by the Committee in 2002-2003. It was adopted at the 23rd meeting of the Committee, held August 21 and 22, 2003.

This report reflects the Committee's main concerns and goals, particularly with respect to teacher training, the orientations of the moral and religious education programs, which fall under the subject area of personal development, and the place of spiritual development in education.

Should you so desire, I would be pleased to discuss with you any of the topics covered in the report.

Yours sincerely,

Jean-Marc Charron



Chair

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This report highlights the activities carried out by the Comité sur les affaires religieuses, hereinafter referred to as “the Committee,” with regard to its mission, mandate and operating procedures for 2002-2003.

In addition, the report describes the Committee’s main analytical focuses in fulfilling its advisory role regarding the adaptation of the school system to the socioreligious evolution of Québec. The report also mentions the ties established with the Ministère de l’Éducation (MEQ) and the various communities and bodies the Committee works with in carrying out its mandate.

In the final part of the report, the Committee reviews the progress made in key areas and identifies the challenges ahead.

1. Presentation of the Committee

The Comité sur les affaires religieuses, a body that advises the Minister of Education, was established under the *Education Act* (section 477.18.1). Its mandate is to inform the Minister on any matters pertaining to the place of religion in schools and on certain related social issues. In particular, the Committee monitors Québec's socioreligious evolution and gives its opinion on the orientations the school system should adopt in this area.

In accordance with the *Education Act*, the Committee is entrusted with approving the confessional aspects of the Catholic and Protestant moral and religious education programs and of local ecumenical programs, and with giving its opinion on the religious aspects of ethics and religious culture programs submitted to the Minister of Education for approval or established by the Minister of Education.

In carrying out its mission, and before approving the confessional aspects of a program, the Committee must consult the churches or religious groups concerned and take their opinions into account. The Committee must also promote dialogue and act as an intermediary between the public, various religious groups, the school system and the government. When necessary, it may also consult authorities with an interest in the issue of religion in the schools.

The 13 members of the Committee are from various groups concerned with the issue of religion in schools and are appointed by the Minister. The composition of the Committee is as follows: two parents of students in elementary school and two parents of students in secondary school; an elementary school teacher and a secondary school teacher; a professional working in the education sector and an administrator, both attached to school boards; four representatives of the university sector; and an employee of the MEQ.

Under the chairmanship of Jean-Marc Charron, the Committee carried out various activities in 2002-2003 and submitted its first brief to the Minister.

2.1 Meetings and operation of the Committee

From July 2002 to June 2003, the Committee held eight meetings, including one telephone conference, for an equivalent of 13 days of meetings.

A number of subcommittees, the nature and mandate of which are reviewed annually, make it possible for the Committee to achieve its objectives. The subcommittees addressed issues in the following areas:

- The programs of study and instructional materials under the Committee's responsibility
- Religious expression in the schools
- Teacher training
- The Basic School Regulation
- The spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service

The Committee follows a code of ethics and professional conduct, in accordance with the requirements of Order-in-Council 824-98. The code is reviewed annually. Internal bylaws facilitate the Committee's operation.

2.2 Main concerns

This year the Committee continued its analysis of the orientations the school system should take and how it should be adapted to the socioreligious evolution of Québec. The Committee's main areas of concern are presented below.

Religious expression in the schools

In response to a request from the Minister, the Committee submitted a brief in March 2003 entitled *Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: The Educational Challenges of Diversity*.

In this first brief, the Committee decided not to address the provisions of the *Education Act* relating to religious education. Rather, it chose to examine the issues surrounding the diversity of religious expression in the schools. The Committee also suggested a number of guidelines that would allow for religious expression while at the same time respecting the educational mission and democratic values of the school.

The Committee's brief outlines principles and decision-making criteria for stakeholders and schools that are grappling with a variety of situations relating to religious diversity. These principles and criteria are based on major policy positions outlined in the government's orientations on the place of religion in public schools and in the *Policy Statement on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education*¹.

¹ Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *A School for the Future: Policy Statement on Educational Integration and Intercultural Education* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1998).

In its brief, the Committee argues that a change in institutional culture is needed if Québec society as a whole is to meet the challenges it faces in the area of religious diversity. Moreover, the Committee feels there should be freedom to express this diversity in the public schools within established guidelines.

A total of 23 recommendations (see Appendix 4) are made to the schools' educational communities, the school boards, the Ministère de l'Éducation, the universities and belief groups. The purpose of the brief is to equip education authorities and schools and to encourage the Minister and the abovementioned partners to address the issue of religious diversity and to embrace it as a valuable opportunity for students to learn to live together. The brief has been asked for by various persons from by the school system, the universities, various associations and institutions in Québec and Europe, and close to 2000 copies have already been distributed.

The place of spirituality in education

In addition to monitoring the establishment of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service, the Committee participated in two regional conferences, in the Outaouais and Trois-Rivières regions, on the subject of setting up such a service. The Committee's overall focus was the place of spirituality in education.

Seeking to enrich its own understanding of this issue, the Committee considered it from various angles:

- The tension between spiritual care and guidance, on the one hand, and community involvement, on the other
- The training and professional development of animators
- Issues relating to the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service
- The need for clarification of the legislative provisions on spiritual development in education, in particular, section 36 of the *Education Act*
- The importance of spirituality in young people's search for identity

To examine these matters in greater depth, the Committee considered the possibility of organizing a conference on spiritual development in education that would bring together experts and researchers and draw on the expertise of school representatives. The conference has in fact been scheduled for November 2003. Participants' contributions to the discussion will further the Committee's understanding of the subject.

Teacher training

In last year's annual report, the Committee noted the precarious situation of initial teacher training in moral and religious education at the elementary and secondary levels. It observed a lack of interest in this area by students planning to become teachers or already enrolled in teacher training programs. The Committee pointed to the difficulty of including enough relevant credits in the subject area in teacher training programs. As well, the less-than-ideal conditions under which moral and religious education is currently being provided raise questions about the professional qualifications of personnel in the schools.

The Committee's concern about the situation prompted it to carry out a documented analysis and to prepare a brief on teacher training. In this brief, the Committee noted that the teacher training difficulties experienced with respect

to the personal development subject area (i.e. a marked decrease in enrollments in most universities as well as the fragmentation and reduction of course offerings) are symptomatic of a major problem in the configuration of the personal development subject area in the elementary and secondary level curriculum.

The Committee will share its observations and recommendations with the Minister in the fall of 2003, when it submits its brief.

2.3 Responsibilities regarding to programs of study

Approval of the confessional aspects of the Secondary Cycle One Catholic and Protestant moral and religious education programs

In 2002-2003, a follow-up was carried out in connection with the development of the Secondary Cycle One moral and religious education Catholic and Protestant education programs and work was done on the approval of the confessional aspects of these programs, in accordance with the provisions of the *Education Act*. This work involved:

- meetings of the subcommittee with the people responsible for designing the programs
- participation in the validation of the programs in the context of the reform of the secondary school curriculum
- consultation with outside experts on Protestantism
- consultation of the churches regarding the confessional aspects of the programs
- analysis of each program
- conditional approval of the programs and final approval, after corrections

In a letter to the Minister of Education granting approval of the confessional aspects of the programs, the chair of the Committee praised the structure and cohesiveness of the proposed programs in relation to their subject orientations. He did inform the Minister, however, that the Committee does not really share the basic subject orientations. In fact, the Committee questions the orientations of the Catholic and Protestant moral and religious education programs and argues that new orientations are needed in today's common and open secular schools.

Examination of local programs

In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 3 of section 477.18.3 of the *Education Act*, the Committee can be called upon to approve the confessional aspects of local ecumenical programs or to give its opinion on the religious aspects of the local ethics and religious culture programs submitted for the Minister's approval. During the year, the Committee gave opinions on the following two programs.

2. Activities of the Committee in 2002-2003

- **Local ecumenical program**

The Lester-B.-Pearson School Board submitted a proposal for a local ecumenical program. The Committee studied the confessional aspects of the program.

The Committee's examination necessitated consultation with the Catholic and Protestant churches as well as with a representative of the Orthodox clergy. In June 2003, the chair submitted the Committee's unconditional approval concerning the confessional aspects of the program. The chair took advantage of the opportunity to acknowledge the perseverance and professionalism with which the members of the Lester-B.-Pearson School Board had worked to make substantial improvements to the version initially submitted and to respect the conditions for approval set out by the Committee. The chair also stressed the efforts made by the program designers to enrich its ecumenical elements.

- **Local ethics and religious culture program**

The Committee examined the proposed Secondary I and II ethics and religious culture program developed by the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, and extended its experimental phase to 2003-2004.

The Committee submitted a favourable opinion to the Minister, accompanied by comments addressed to the personnel concerned at the school board. These comments referred to the religious culture content that needed to be emphasized in order to provide a more equitable balance between the program's two fundamental dimensions: education in ethics and religious education. This exercise afforded the Committee a welcome opportunity to assess a program that is likely to promote harmonious coexistence among the students for whom it is intended.

3.1 Dialogue with various bodies within the education system

The year 2002-2003 was marked by collaboration with various bodies within the education system.

Dialogue with the Direction générale de la formation des jeunes and the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires

In terms of its involvement in the development of the Secondary Cycle One Catholic and Protestant moral and religious education programs and the approval of the confessional aspects of these programs, the Committee enjoyed good cooperation from the program development officers and managers at the MEQ's Direction générale de la formation des jeunes (DGFJ). A subcommittee was in contact with the program development officers several times. The Committee relied on expert opinions on Protestantism and the judicious comments of the churches consulted. The Committee carried out its work in accordance with ministerial parameters, and feels that the process of collaboration with the DGFJ encouraged the progressive consideration of the requested changes to the programs.

The Committee received constant cooperation and all the information it sought from the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service officer at the Direction de l'adaptation scolaire et des services complémentaires (DASSC) with respect to the implementation of this service and associated issues. The Committee was informed of changes in the situation of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service during the year.

Dialogue with the Bureau d'approbation du matériel didactique

As part of its collaborative work with the MEQ, the Committee followed up on the cooperation agreement concluded with the Bureau d'approbation du matériel didactique (BAMD). Assisted by a subcommittee, the Committee examined and gave its assessment of various types of instructional materials relating to:

- Catholic Religious and Moral Instruction in the second and third cycles of elementary school: student textbooks and teacher's guides
- the use of Catholic and Protestant Bibles geared to elementary and secondary level students

In the first case, the Committee sought the expertise of a specialized resource person in order to provide a more detailed assessment to the BAMD. The Committee found the experience of collaborating with the BAMD very useful in the context of the curriculum reform at the elementary and secondary levels.

Dialogue with the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

On December 12, 2002, the chair of the Committee met with Jean-Pierre Proulx, president of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation (CSE). Their discussion focused on:

- the respective missions of the two bodies in the "deconfessionalization" of the education system
- the Committee's brief, then in preparation, on religious expression in schools
- teacher training
- the Basic School Regulation

3. Links with the MEQ and the Community

The meeting provided an opportunity for the two parties to agree on the usefulness of communicating regularly. In an upcoming meeting, the Committee intends to share its concerns about the Basic School Regulation, notably with respect to the personal development subject area and the place accorded to the new ethics and religious culture course.

3.2 Relations with the community and external partners

In its relations with the community, the Committee took part in various activities, which mainly involved consultation with churches and communication with a growing number of external partners.

Communication with churches

At Msgr. Pierre Morissette's invitation, the chair of the Committee met with the Christian education committee of the Assemblée des évêques du Québec (AEQ). They discussed collaboration between the two bodies, the Basic School Regulation, the impact of changes in the schools with respect to teaching and services related to religion, and the expiry of the notwithstanding clauses.

As well, the chair of the Committee contacted Mr Glenn Smith, president of the Protestant Partnership on Education, to discuss a number of issues, including its dissatisfaction with the quality of the Protestant moral and religious education services offered by the school system and the conditions under which these services are provided. The chair was invited to give a presentation on the brief *Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: The Educational Challenges of Diversity* to the members of the Protestant Partnership on Education in 2003-2004.

In examining the confessional aspects of a local ecumenical program, the Committee received helpful comments from a representative of the orthodox clergy. As a result, the Committee established working ties with Father Elie Touma, president of the Orthodox Clergy Association of Québec.

In addition to consulting churches on confessional and local programs, the Committee hopes to establish regular communication with these partners on other matters.

Consultation with representatives of religious and spiritual traditions in Québec

The Committee is "able to make an effective contribution to consensus-building and serve as an interface between the public, various religious groups, the school system and the government.² Thus, in order to increase the number of religious groups, organizations and experts who could be called upon to collaborate or give their opinions in future consultations, the Committee established the *Groupe de consultation sur le fait religieux*.

The *Groupe de consultation sur le fait religieux*, which has approximately 40 members, brings together representatives of Québec's main religious, spiritual and Native traditions.

² Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2000), 16.

The members of the group are representative of their communities without acting as their official spokespersons. They make their communities' views known on laws, regulations, administrative measures and events connected with religion in general, and in the school context in particular. The Group also includes a few experts on religion.

The Group met for the first time in June 2003. This initiative was well received by the members of the group, who responded enthusiastically to the Committee's invitation. The Committee anticipates holding two or three meetings a year.

Communication with external partners and the general public

Through numerous activities and interactions, the Committee was able to extend its network of external collaborators.

- **Two meetings with the Conseil des relations interculturelles (CRI)**

At the invitation of Pierre Ancil, president of the Conseil des relations interculturelles, Jean-Marc Charron gave a presentation on March 17, 2003, as part of a day of reflection. The title of his presentation was "La diversité religieuse: inclusion ou exclusion" (religious diversity: inclusion or exclusion). At a subsequent meeting, Pierre Ancil and Jean-Marc Charron held further discussions on this theme and agreed on areas for future collaboration. The two men share similar views on the principles involved with respect to the place of religion in the public sphere.

- **Joint presentation at the annual convention of the Association des conseillers au service de l'éducation spirituelle, religieuse et morale (ACSESRM) and the Association québécoise des professeurs de morale et de religion (AQPMR)**

At the annual convention of these two associations, in the fall of 2002, Jean-Marc Charron gave a joint presentation with Christine Cadrin-Pelletier, secretary for religious affairs at the MEQ. The members of these associations indicated that they were concerned about the future of moral and religious education and the impact of the changes (already made or still to come) on their work.

- **Presentation at Forum 2003 of the Centre spiritualités et religions de Montréal (CSRM)**

The theme of the CSRM's Forum 2003 raised a major question for Québec society: "La diversité culturelle et religieuse: menace ou chance pour la cité?" (cultural and religious diversity: a threat to the community or an opportunity?).

Jean-Marc Charron, chair of the Committee, addressed this theme in his speech. Mr. Charron took advantage of the opportunity to present the Comité sur les affaires religieuses, its mission and its position on religious education in the context of diversity in Québec. He also outlined the elements of the Committee's brief *Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: The Educational Challenges of Diversity*.

Aware of the need to participate in the dialogue proposed to the delegates, who represented all religious and spiritual persuasions, Mr. Charron highlighted the positive initiative taken by the CSRM in organizing the Forum. He told his audience that the Committee considered the event an indispensable tool for updating views on diversity, which is increasingly present in the public sphere in Québec, and as an additional springboard for making Québec an open and united society.

3. Links with the MEQ and the Community

- **Meeting with the president of the Mouvement laïque québécois (MLQ)**

In June 2003, Jean-Marc Charron invited Henri Laberge, president of the Mouvement laïque québécois, to meet with him.

This initial meeting was an opportunity to discuss each organization's mission and mandate, confessional religious education in public schools and the use of the notwithstanding clauses.

The representatives of the two organizations agreed to hold more meetings in 2003-2004 in order to discuss these matters in greater depth as well as to discuss the Committee's first brief on religious expression in schools. The Committee is aware of the importance of establishing ties with organizations reflecting on secularism in the public sphere, particularly at school.

- **Attendance at the first annual convention of the Association professionnelle des animateurs de vie spirituelle et d'engagement communautaire du Québec (APAVECQ)**

At this convention, in June 2003, the chair represented the Committee. The themes covered by the members of this new association convinced the Committee of its desire to pursue its reflection on the spiritual development of students in the current context.

4.1 Future of the orientations of the school system

The changes made to take into account religious expression in the schools date from June 2000. Although these changes appear to have been carried out in relative calm, some issues remain a focus of concern. In any event, there is a need to sensitize and educate the various players in the education community in order to ensure that the letter and the spirit of the law are well understood and implemented. What is at issue is a certain vision of religion and its place in culture and society, and the consequences for public institutions in general and the schools in particular.

The educational challenge of diversity and the handling of religious expression in schools

In its brief *Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: The Educational Challenges of Diversity*, the Committee emphasizes that religious diversity has emerged as a social reality that must be taken into account, and that this diversity calls for a new way of thinking about the place of religion in the public sphere and the type of relationship institutions should be encouraged to maintain with the various belief groups.

The Committee feels strongly that its interpretation of the issues surrounding religious diversity should be widely disseminated in the schools to promote reflection by all stakeholders and the development of local guidelines and policies on these questions. The Committee will remain attentive to the schools' reflections.

The precarious situation of the personal development subject area

In the course of its analysis of teacher training, the Committee noted the precarious status of the personal development subject area in the current curriculum. This situation not only limits the appeal of the subject area to future teachers, but also jeopardizes the handling of ethical and religious issues in students' education. Insofar as an introduction to these issues appears essential to the development of a citizenship culture suited to new social realities—and the Committee is convinced that this is the case—it becomes a matter of urgency that this area of education be substantially redefined.

Thus, the personal development subject area and, consequently, the weight given to the teaching of religion in the curriculum will be the Committee's major focus in 2003-2004. Accordingly, the Committee intends to participate in the next consultation on changes to the Basic School Regulation.

The place of spiritual development in education

The *Education Act* makes guiding students in their spiritual development the school's responsibility (see section 36). The creation of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service is one example of how this responsibility is being dealt with. The Committee is very concerned that effective conditions for providing this service be established in the schools. It appears that certain school boards are not making the necessary effort to provide this service to their students: sometimes no provision is made for an animator, or untrained and otherwise unqualified personnel are put in charge.

The Committee is particularly concerned about the quality of the initial training and professional development of personnel responsible for spiritual care and guidance and community involvement services, given the considerable educational challenge these staff members face. As a result of ministry orientations stipulating that these services

be provided by qualified professionals, some universities have made an effort to design appropriate initial training programs. What is the status of these programs today and how does the MEQ intend to promote professional development for personnel providing these services?

It should be recalled that the first animators have had the benefit of a three-year professional development plan that will come to an end in 2003-2004. Here again, the Committee wonders what the MEQ's intentions are with respect to extending the professional development plan and the continuing education prospects for personnel. The Committee would like to draw the Minister's attention to the importance of the selection and appropriate training of personnel as determining factors for the quality and future of this expanding service.

More generally, the Committee wonders how the school team will manage this new collective responsibility conferred on it by law. Addressing students' spiritual development in the context of a secular school system gives rise to a certain number of questions. Accordingly, the Committee will organize a conference on spiritual development in education. Specialists in different areas will participate, allowing the Committee to pursue its analysis of the subject. The proceedings of the conference, which should be published in 2004, will provide food for thought for the education community.

Teacher training

The importance of current ethical and religious questions and the need to offer students appropriate training that allows them to learn about Western religious culture, understand the complexity of the world they live in, acquire general knowledge and develop a sense of global consciousness lead the Committee to make teacher training a priority. The Committee will ensure that its brief on the subject is distributed soon to the various institutions concerned with initial teacher training and professional development.

4.2 Responsibilities regarding programs of study

Ministry program on ethics and religious culture

In the government orientations of the spring of 2000 on the place of religion in the schools, the development of a new program on ethics and religious culture in Secondary Cycle Two was announced. The Committee has high expectations for this program, which for various reasons could not be implemented until now. The Committee members are concerned about the educational aims of the program, which, at the end of the students' school career, combines two fields of knowledge, ethics and religious culture.

The Commission des programmes d'études had already considered the relevance and feasibility of such a pairing, which appeared unrealistic in terms of the time allocated to the program in the timetable. The Committee fully shares this line of reasoning and is concerned about the program's theoretical basis. To mention but one of the possible pitfalls, the Committee fears that the program might focus on values education to the detriment of true instruction based on the acquisition of knowledge and competencies specific to the areas of ethics and religious culture.

The educational aims of the program must thus be clearly identified, and to this end the Committee urges the MEQ to adopt a rigorous process, supported by solid research that will serve as a basis for the program itself and as a guide in training the school personnel who will teach it.

4.3 Communication with the public

Relations with the community and partners within and outside Québec

In order to make greater use of networking and consultation with partners, the Committee intends to consolidate its relations with representatives of various religious, spiritual and secular groups as well as with organizations concerned with religion in the schools.

Thus, the Committee expects to strengthen its collaborative ties with different organizations, including the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, the Conseil des relations interculturelles, the Centre spiritualités et religions de Montréal, and the Mouvement laïque québécois. In the context of analyzing programs and educational services for students, the Committee will listen to the concerns of organizations such as professional associations and educational administrators' associations. If need be, it will consult the Minister's other committees and various specialized resource persons within and outside Québec.

The year 2002-2003 was very productive in terms of work relating to the recognition of the socioreligious reality of the school environment, the analysis of programs of study, and reflection on these programs, and the importance of the training of teachers and other school personnel in the new context. Through its work, the Committee has gained maturity and strengthened its identity.

The Committee is aware, however, that in order to play a useful advisory role, it must collaborate with the government departments and public agencies concerned with the place of religion in the public sphere. It therefore intends to pursue its efforts in this area.

The Committee recognizes that the use of the notwithstanding clauses is behind many of the issues raised in the final chapter of this report. It is well aware that the 2005 deadline will force the Minister to make decisions about religious education. One of the main concerns of the Committee in 2003-2004 will be to examine the pertinence of the Government recourse to the notwithstanding clauses.

The Committee will prepare itself to continue its analysis of the subject in order to advise the Minister and the schools on this matter or on any other subject within its purview. The Committee seeks to promote the establishment of a new institutional culture that stands out for achieving renewed recognition of religion in the context of today's open and secular schools.

COMPOSITION AND MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE



Excerpts from the *Education Act*

Chapter VII, section II.1

Establishment

477.18.1. A Religious Affairs Committee is hereby established.

477.18.2. The Committee shall be composed of 13 members, including the committee chair, appointed by the Minister after consultation with groups or bodies active in the religious sector or in the education field, as follows:

- 1° two parents of students attending an elementary school and two parents of students attending a secondary school;
- 2° four members of the staff of school boards, including a teacher at the elementary level, a teacher at the secondary level, an education sector professional exercising education functions and a member of the management staff whose functions are related to educational services;
- 3° four representatives of the university education sector, including two from the field of theology, one from the field of philosophy and one from the field of religious sciences;
- 4° an employee of the Ministère de l'Éducation.

The member referred to in subparagraph 4 of the first paragraph may not be appointed as the committee chair.

Mission and functions

477.18.3. The mission of the committee is to advise the Minister on any matter relating to the place of religion in schools.

The committee may be called upon, in particular, to give its opinion on the orientations to be favoured in this area by the school system and on the adaptation of the school system to the socioreligious evolution of Québec society.

The committee shall approve the confessional aspects of the programs of Catholic and Protestant moral and religious instruction established by the Minister under section 461 and of the local programs of studies in oecumenism; the committee shall also give its opinion on the religious aspects of the local programs of studies in ethics and religious culture submitted to the Minister for approval or established by the Minister.

Before approving the confessional aspects of a program, the committee shall take into account the opinions of the churches concerned; when it is called upon to give its opinion, the committee may consult religious groups and persons or bodies particularly interested in religious issues.

Operation

477.19. Members [...] of the committees shall be appointed for three years.

However, the Minister may appoint one-third of the first members designated by the Minister for one year and another third of the members designated by the Minister for two years.

477.20. At the expiry of their terms, the members shall remain in office until reappointed or replaced.

The total duration of successive terms of a member and of any period in which the member remained in office between terms shall not exceed six years. At the end of such a six-year period, a member shall remain in office until replaced.

477.21. Any vacancy during a term of office shall be filled, in the manner prescribed for the member's appointment, for the unexpired portion of the term.

477.22. Members [...] of the committees shall receive no remuneration except in such cases, or such conditions and to such extent as the Government may determine. They are, however, entitled to the reimbursement of expenses incurred in the exercise of their functions on the condition and to the extent determined by the Government.

477.23. The chair shall preside at the meetings [...] of the committee and manage its operations.

The Minister shall designate a member [...] of the committee to replace the chair if the chair is absent or unable to act.

477.24. The quorum at meetings [...] of a committee is the majority of its members.

477.25. [...] the committees may hold their meetings anywhere in Québec.

477.26. The Minister shall place at the disposal [...] of the committees the department personnel and physical resources they need for the exercise of their missions.

Annual report

477.27. [...] each of the committees shall submit to the Minister, not later than 15 November each year, a report of its activities for the school year ending on the preceding 30 June.

477.28. The Minister shall table the reports in the National Assembly within 30 days after receiving them if the Assembly is in session or, if it is not sitting, within 30 days of resumption.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE
IN 2002-2003



Members of the Committee in 2002-2003

Jean-Marc Charron (Chair)	Theologian and dean Faculté de théologie Université de Montréal
Rafat Norr Khan	Parent of a student in elementary school
David Harries	Parent of a student in elementary school
Richard Flibotte	Parent of a student in secondary school
Béatrice Swift	Parent of a student in secondary school
Gilles Héroux	Secondary school teacher Commission scolaire des Patriotes
Lison Jean	Elementary school teacher Commission scolaire des Phares
Roch Bérubé	School board administrator Commission scolaire du Val-des-Cerfs
Réal J. Vien	Animator of student services in spiritual care and guidance and community involvement Commission scolaire de Montréal
Thomas De Koninck	Philosopher and professor Faculté de philosophie Université Laval
Patricia Kirkpatrick	Theologian Faculty of Religious Studies McGill University
Fernand Ouellet	Religious sciences and intercultural education specialist Université de Sherbrooke
Christine Cadrin-Pelletier	Secrétaire aux affaires religieuses Ministère de l'Éducation

CODE OF ETHICS
AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT OF THE COMMITTEE



Code of ethics and professional conduct of the Committee

I. Ethics: Mission, Commitments and Values

1.1 Mission and mandate of the Committee

The mission of the Comité sur les affaires religieuses (“the Committee”) is to advise the Minister on any matter relating to the place of religion in schools.

The Committee may be called upon, in particular, to give its opinion on the orientations to be favoured in this area by the school system and on the adaptation of the school system to the socioreligious evolution of Québec society.

The Committee shall approve the confessional aspects of the programs of Catholic and Protestant moral and religious instruction established by the Minister under section 461 and of the local programs in ecumenism; the Committee shall also give its opinion on the religious aspects of the local programs of studies in ethics and religious culture submitted to the Minister for approval or established by the Minister.

Before approving the confessional aspects of a program, the committee shall take into account the opinions of the churches concerned; when it is called upon to give its opinion, the Committee may consult religious groups and persons or bodies particularly interested in religious issues.

1.2 Commitment of members of the Committee

The members agree to contribute to the mission of the Committee.

They shall make their contribution in accordance with the law, with honesty, prudence, diligence, efficiency, application and fairness. Each member is bound to loyalty in the performance of his duties within the Committee.

1.3 Commitment of members to the issues examined by the Committee

Each member of the Committee agrees to:

- respect the socioreligious diversity of Québec; the member, in participating in the work of the Committee, must seek understanding, be attentive to the different communities, show discernment and carry out in-depth analyses;
- actively participate in the work and provide opinions that are as detailed and as clear as possible;
- acknowledge the importance of and promote, in his or her statements, moral, spiritual and religious instruction for young people in the Québec school system.

II. Professional Conduct: Obligations and Duties

2.1 Discretion

In general, the members of the Committee are bound to discretion as regards deliberations and discussions and with regard to information presented within the framework of their duties.

When the Chair determines that an item of information, a topic of study or a document is of a confidential nature, the members of the CAR are morally bound to not disclose the content. A note indicating that a document is confidential must appear on all documents of this nature.

2.2 Relations with the public

The Chair is mandated to act and speak on behalf of the Committee. In certain situations, the Chair may delegate this task to one or more members.

Any information released to the public on behalf of the Committee must make known or explain the various tasks of the Committee.

2.3 Neutrality

The members of Committee shall, in the performance of their duties, act independently of any partisan political consideration or pressure group.

2.4 Conflict of interest

The members of the Committee shall, in the performance of their duties, avoid placing themselves in a situation of conflict, either real or apparent, between their personal interests and that of the public.

The members of the Committee may not use for their own benefit, or for the benefit of a third party, confidential, unreported or privileged information obtained in the performance of their duties, except where express authorization has been given by the Committee.

Within the framework of their duties, the members of the Committee may not solicit or accept a favour or an undue advantage for themselves or for a third party.

2.5 Disclosure of interest

Any member of the Committee who has direct or indirect interest in an organization, corporation or association that is likely to place him or her in a situation of conflict between his personal interest and

that of the Committee must reveal the interest to the Chair of the Committee. This interest must be revealed in writing and renewed once a year beginning with the appointment of the member. The same holds true for the Chair, who must reveal his or her own interest to the appropriate authority.

If an item on the agenda is likely to place any member in a situation of conflict of interest, he or she must leave the meeting and not take part or in any way influence the discussions and decisions of the Committee.

2.6 Representativeness of community values

In keeping with the mission of the Committee, the members are bound to take into account the socioreligious diversity of Québec society.

2.7 Links with the different communities

Considering the Committee's mandate for consultation, the members agree to establish an open and respectful dialogue with the various people and organizations interested in the question of the place of religion in the schools.

2.8 post-mandate

Members who have completed their mandate are bound to respect the confidentiality of all information that was obtained in the exercise of their duties and that is not available to the public.

Members who have terminated their mandate are prohibited from disclosing confidential information or using it for their benefit or for the benefit of a third party.

III. Application Measures

3.1 Responsibility of members

Members are bound to comply with the ethical principles and the rules of professional conduct related to their duties.

It is the responsibility of each member to perform his or her duties to the best of his or her abilities and knowledge, with diligence and integrity and in compliance with legislation and the public interest.

The members of the CAR must demonstrate wisdom and honesty and a sense of moral obligation in keeping with the obligations of the mandate entrusted to them.

3.2 Responsibilities of the Chair

The Chair is responsible for implementing the present code and shall ensure that all members comply with its ethical principles and rules of professional conduct.

The Chair must inform the appropriate authority of all or any violations of the present code.

A member who determines that the Chair has violated the present code shall notify the appropriate authority.

IV. Publication of the Code and its Application

4.1 Annual report

The present code must be published in the Committee's Annual Report. In addition, if it is determined that violations of ethics and professional conduct have occurred, the Annual Report shall include any follow-up made in this regard.

4.2 Accessibility to the public

The Committee shall ensure that the code is made accessible to the public.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE'S BRIEF
*Religious Rites and Symbols in Schools:
The Educational Challenges of Diversity*



Recommendations of the Committee's brief
Religious Rites and Symbols in the Schools: the Educational Challenges of Diversity

Whereas religious diversity in the schools

- is a social reality that cannot be ignored
- can be more or less pronounced and assumes different forms, depending on the region
- calls for in-depth analysis by those who wish to grasp its complexity
- must be considered in keeping with the right to equality and to freedom of conscience and religion
- represents an educational challenge for the school staff
- requires training for the various stakeholders
- calls for a change in institutional culture
- requires flexible, adapted and concerted management mechanisms that
 - are based on clearly stated principles recognized by all those involved
 - call upon the skills of all those involved
- is expressed in the context of the transformations currently taking place in the education system, in the form of the
 - implementation of the reform and of a revised curriculum
 - move toward a non-denominational school system
 - implementation of the new spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service

the Comité sur les affaires religieuses recommends that:

The schools' educational communities³

- take into account the religious diversity that exists in schools, as part of the orientations of the educational projects of secular public schools, while ensuring that all involved enjoy equal rights in religious matters and respect for their freedom of conscience and religion⁴
- manage religious diversity by drawing on the decision-making criteria set out in this brief and in the policy statement *A School for the Future: Educational Integration and Intercultural Education*

³ An educational community is a school that calls upon all those involved in the school and the surrounding community to carry out its educational mission. The expression refers, therefore, to the school principal, teachers and other members of the school staff, as well as to parents, students and representatives of the community as a whole. The educational community carries out its responsibilities within the framework of the governing board. Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *L'école, une communauté éducative* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1998), p. 15. [Free translation]

⁴ *Education Act*, section 37.

- encourage the school staff, particularly all teachers, to participate in a concerted effort to reconcile religious expression with education based on common civic values
- gather all necessary information, call upon the parents to participate⁵ and, if necessary, consult specialized resource people in order to make informed decisions concerning religious diversity
- ensure that all decisions concerning religious diversity are the result of a collective process that includes the school team and the parents, and respects individual rights and the desire for reasonable accommodation
- promote among teachers in all subjects, the professional ethics required to deal with these questions in the classroom in a spirit of openness and impartiality
- encourage parents, the school team and members of the governing board to become informed so that they are more aware of the reality of religious diversity
- involve the student council and indeed all of the students in projects that allow them to experience the sharing of common values and have respect for religious diversity, while validating their initiatives toward this end⁶

The school boards

- share information and experience pertaining to religious diversity with the other English- and French-language school boards
- provide the school staff with the training they need to accommodate religious diversity, and offer them and the members of the governing board any necessary support through the services of spiritual, religious and moral education counsellors
- organize, during meetings of school principals, peer training sessions that focus on problems and solutions related to the expression of religious diversity in order to ensure that schools adopt consistent intervention strategies
- consult, in cases of conflict over religious matters, representatives of the religion(s) involved with a view to finding pedagogically viable solutions satisfactory to all parties through discussion and dialogue

⁵ *Education Act*, section 96.2, 96.3.

⁶ *Education Act*, section 96.6.

The ministère de l'Éducation

- helps schools to assimilate the concepts and apply the criteria elucidated in this brief with a view to a fruitful accommodation of religious diversity
- attaches greater importance to the field of personal development and promotes recognition of cultural and religious diversity and respect for democratic values in all courses, in accordance with Measure 7 of the *Plan of Action for Educational Integration and Intercultural Education*⁷
- provides future teachers in all subject areas with training that will enable them to “acquire certain elements of religious culture and history” and to foster harmonious relationships between students of different belief groups, in accordance with the government orientations on the place of religion in the schools⁸
- ensure that all teachers receive, as part of the required professional skills set out in the ministerial orientations on teacher training,⁹ the preparation they need to “act in an ethical and responsible manner” in matters pertaining to religious diversity
- ensures that the universities offer religion teachers, moral education teachers and members of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service training that equips them to function as resource people in matters pertaining to religious diversity
- guarantees school boards the resources they need to adequately staff the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service and ensures that the allotted resources are used for this purpose, so that this service may effectively contribute to the management of religious diversity

The universities

- provide future teachers in all subject areas with training that will enable them to “acquire certain elements of religious culture and history”¹⁰ and to foster harmonious relationships between students of different belief groups, in accordance with the government orientations on the place of religion in the schools
- ensure that all teachers receive, as part of the required professional skills set out in the ministerial orientations on teacher training, the preparation they need to “act in an ethical and responsible manner” in matters pertaining to religious diversity
- offer religion teachers, moral education teachers and members of the spiritual care and guidance and community involvement service initial and ongoing training that equips them to function as resource people in matters pertaining to religious diversity

⁷ Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Plan of Action for Educational Integration and Intercultural Education, 1998-2002* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1998), p.8

⁸ Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *La formation à l'enseignement. Les orientations. Les compétences professionnelles* (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2001).

⁹ *La Formation à l'enseignement. Les orientations. Les compétences professionnelles*, p.159.

¹⁰ *Québec's Public Schools: Responding to the Diversity of Moral and Religious Expectations*, p.11.

Belief groups

- cooperate with the school authorities in a spirit of dialogue and respect for the school's educational standards, in order to promote understanding and harmony among students of different belief groups
- learn about the reality of the school and ensure that they clearly understand its specific contribution in terms of educating students about religious diversity, living together and democratic life

