



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

L'ÉGLISE UNIE DU CANADA

Conseil régional

Nakonha:ka

Regional Council

Minister Jean-François Roberge

Ministre de l'Éducation

January 10, 2020

Cher Monsieur le Ministre,

The United Church of Canada, Conseil régional Nakonha:ka Regional Council, wishes to express to you its concern with respect to Bill 40, and especially with the provision to abolish Article 6 of the Education Act, which would, in effect, abolish the profession of Spiritual & Community Animators.

We understand the cultural context and history of Québec in the areas of religion. We also understand that there are lingering wounds suffered by many Québécois during « La Grande noirceur », especially as that experience relates to omnipresent role of organized religion. As Canada's largest protestant denomination, we are sensitive to this element in our work in Québec, and still see some of the effects of this period in people today, including in their children, and grand-children. As a church, we understand and are sensitive to how this period played a major role in shaping Québec's vision of a secular society, born out of *La Révolution tranquille*.

Our concern lies with your decision to abolish the profession of Spiritual and Community Animators in the Québec School System. Apart from one other jurisdiction in Switzerland, Québec is the only region that has created a profession that centres on the care of the whole student, including the nurturing of their “inner-life”. The creation of this service continues to be seen as an innovative response to diversity in a society that seeks a certain neutrality in government institutions. Defined broadly, this would be what we would call “spirituality”, which we wish to differentiate from “religion”. We are concerned with what we interpret to be a confusing of these two words, where, in fact, we feel that there is an important distinction to be made.

Nurturing the “inner-life” or “spirituality” of students in Québec is not about the promulgation of any one religion or catechism, but rather, about affirming the core values of the student and encouraging them to find their own path to further developing and grounding these values in their journey toward adulthood. The work of the Spiritual &



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Community Animators is very much the empowering of and exploring of these core and shared values in *an education of the heart*. Spiritual Animators teach students to be good at compassion and social justice which, according to numerous studies, help the student be better at other subjects like math, science, languages and the arts. This service helps instil in students in Québec a sense of the collective, of the importance of social justice, and of the urgency to become involved in the betterment of society. We are profoundly concerned as a denomination that the abolition of this profession, as called for in Bill 40, will deprive our students of an essential part of whole-person learning. We therefore respectfully request that you please remove from Bill 40 the portion that abolishes Article 6 from the Education Act. We feel this is an essential service to students, and are concerned about a probable degradation of education in common values, ethical concerns, and community engagement.

In a recent survey conducted by the United Church of Canada with Léger & Léger, 2 000 francophones in Québec were questioned about their views concerning spirituality and/or religion.

The following specific question was put to the population surveyed:

“Selon vous, à qui revient en premier lieu la responsabilité de l'éducation religieuse ou spirituelle des enfants?”

Of those responding, a majority of respondents placed the 1st responsibility with the parents. **However**, when questioned further, respondents cited that the 2nd most important element responsible for the spiritual/religious development of the child is ***the school***, with 33% citing this instance of responsibility.

While we in no way wish to suggest formal religious education in the school system of a secular society, we do find it interesting that such a high percentage of respondents consider the school as playing an important role in the spiritual/inner-life education of the child. We would like to offer these statistics for your reflection in perhaps re-framing the idea of the nurturing of the inner-life/spiritual life in the schools as something separate from religious education (catechism) and more of an essential part of education in the common core values we share as a society. We feel that retaining the profession of Spiritual & Community Animators, by defining spirituality in its broadest terms of “inner-life”, is actually more consistent with the wishes of the Québec population than the abolition of this profession. Once again, we make here a distinction between “religion” and “spiritual/inner-life”.



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We would be pleased to meet with you in the coming weeks to further explain our concerns with Bill 40 and to elaborate on why we feel that Spiritual & Community Animators play an essential role in the whole-person education of Québec's students. We feel we can contribute to the on-going study of Bill 40 while it is in the legislative process, and would appreciate the opportunity to do so at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Lambie (Rev.)
Executive Minister \ ministre exécutif
Nakonha:ka Regional Council – Conseil régional du Nakonha:ka