

Province tells Christian school pupils they don't count

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Ontario Liberal Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne last month indicated that 250 Peterborough and area children and their parents are not considered to be "persons" within the meaning of public policy and law in Ontario. Neither should they be regarded as forming part of the Peterborough and provincial "community" or considered as able "to contribute fully" to its "development and well-being." In other words, they simply don't count. Here is what very quietly happened.

In March our local Rhema Elementary Christian School received the provincial minister's notice that the federal government's grant funds for the teaching of French at Rhema would no longer be passed on to Rhema. Her grounds were that it is Ontario's vision "to build a strong and vibrant publicly-funded system" and that "Ontario is under no obligation to allocate part of this funding to private schools," even though by federal intention Rhema's portion remains included in the federal government's transfer payment to the province. Since the early 1970s and up until 2007 the federal government paid the grant directly to independent schools. Rhema always correctly and faithfully met and continues to meet the federal grant program's eligibility and obligation requirements.

In 2007 the province took over direct distribution of these federal grants, which are to be made available to all students in Canada, but did not disclose to the federal government that it did not intend to pass on the intended grant to Rhema.

Minister Wynne and her Ontario government believe there is no obligation in the case of Rhema to uphold the province's own Human Rights Code which states: "... it is public policy in Ontario to recognize the dignity and worth of every person and to provide for equal rights and opportunities without discrimination that is contrary to law, and having as its aim the creation of a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person so that each person feels a part of the community and able to contribute fully to the development and well-being of the community and the Province."

In some quarters the provincial action would be called misappropriation of federally allocated funds. In Ontario, the provincial government calls it justice.

And the local "community" in which these Rhema children and their parents live? It is disturbingly silent on all fronts; after all, who cares about 250 children more or less, let alone their doubly financially-stressed parents. Their only hope is the direct intervention by their federal member of Parliament.

RALPH L. DE GROOT