



Canadian bishops' organization: Combat bullying by raising up children in Christian virtue

Published September 25, 2013
By Thaddeus Baklinski

OTTAWA, September 25, 2013 (LifeSiteNews.com) - The Catholic Organization for Life and Family (COLF) has published a booklet addressing the problem and consequences of bullying faced by children and teens, and has concluded that while programs and legislation aimed at reducing bullying are marginally helpful, the real solution lies in parents instilling Christian virtue in their children.

"For us as Christian parents, training our children to master human and Christian virtues – personal as well as social ones – amounts to gradually building a new culture of life," the organization, sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Knights of Columbus, said in "Bullying: A plague to combat together."

In recent years Canada and the United States have seen a rapid growth in school and government programs aimed at combating bullying. However, pro-family critics have raised concerns that in many cases these programs have been initiated by gay activists with a thinly veiled agenda to marginalize any disagreement with the homosexual lifestyle as "bullying." Last year, Ontario passed Bill 13, an "anti-bullying" bill that mandated that schools, including Catholic schools, allow the formation of Gay Straight Alliances. A similar bill is currently being debated in Manitoba.

COLF acknowledges the real problem of bullying in schools, but proposes a solution rooted in Christian virtue and the family. "We are in an ideal position to take up this challenge with our children so that they are attracted to what is good and just, and develop a personal and intimate relationship with Jesus," says COLF. "Their education is first and foremost our responsibility. This is why governments have a duty to support us, rather than to replace us, in this vital task."

COLF states that the home environment plays a crucial role in the problem of bullying, quoting **Peter Jon Mitchell of the Institute for Marriage and Family Canada, in defense of this position. In his article titled "Family responses to bullying – Why governments won't stop bullying until families step up," Mitchell said that "ongoing research suggests that the context and family environment can either cause aggressive behavior, or protect against the effects of bullying."**

Describing different parenting styles, and pointing out the consequences of those styles, the booklet notes that the child of authoritarian parents grows up in a strict, cold environment; if the child is condemned along with the behavior, he or she will feel shamed and rejected. Someday, the child may decide to bully others.

Meanwhile, the child of permissive parents, growing up without sufficient parental supervision, or without loving care and without sufficient cognitive stimulation – or if the child does not learn how to resolve conflicts appropriately – can also lead the child to engage in bullying behavior.

"But the child whose parents exercise their authority through proper supervision, while maintaining a warm relationship with the child, knows what the expectations and limits are, as these have been clearly outlined. This style of parenting reassures the child. An increase in the father's presence in the child's life also seems to protect the child from the temptation to bully," COLF says.

"More than ever," the pro-family organization says, "parenting is a demanding task. Especially because the traditional allies of the family, the extended family and like-minded neighborhoods, have almost become a thing of the past. The family also has more enemies, starting with a toxic media culture and many overly permissive parents."

"It is almost certain," COLF states, "that in this era dominated by individualism and selfishness, our children and adolescents will be confronted by the reality of bullying or the temptation to bully. How will they react? Will they have the fortitude to take a firm stance? If they have learned from their parents to recognize that other kids are God's children just as much as they are, they will no doubt ask themselves: 'What would Jesus do?' And they will find in their heart the strength to act and react in order to give life as well as to protect, respect and encourage life."

The path to instilling Christian virtue in children is given in a detailed list of "parenting virtues" that includes loving your children by being physically and emotionally present to them; prioritizing character education over academic performance; exercising parental authority firmly but reasonably; disciplining wisely; teaching by example; offering moral alternatives to immoral and sexualized media; and encouraging spiritual development.

Concluding that institutionalized "programs" and government legislation help reduce, but do not eliminated incidences of bullying, COLF states that the cruelty and disrespect of bullying can be ended by parents who "go back to one of the basic principles of character education: promoting the opposite virtues, that is, kindness and respect."

"The family is at the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love," said Blessed John Paul II, in his Letter to Families. "It is to the family that is entrusted the task of fighting first to release the forces of good, whose source is in Christ, the Redeemer of man."

COLF is co-sponsored by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and the Supreme Council of the Knights of Columbus. It promotes respect for human life and dignity and the essential role of the family.

1912 – 130 rue Albert Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5G4
T 613.565.3832 f/t 613.565.3803 1.866.373.4632
www.imfcanada.org