



SIMCOE MUSKOKA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Practice and Procedure Around Religious Education Exemptions

Our Virtues and Values:

“Catholic schools must be places where students can hear Jesus’ invitation to follow Him, where they can receive His command to love all people, and where they can realize His presence and His promise to be with them always. Only in this way can they be nurtured and encouraged to become who they are meant to be: persons of dignity and freedom, created in the image and likeness of God as modeled in Jesus Christ.” (Institute for Catholic Education)



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EXPECTATIONS AND PROCEDURE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION EXEMPTIONS

Students registering in a secondary school in the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board will be required to register for one religion course in each year of attendance.

Students enrolled in a Catholic school are expected to participate fully in the faith life of the school which includes any religious program, course or activity with a substantial component of religious content (i.e., liturgies, masses, retreats, etc.).

Registration forms will show religion as a compulsory course in each of the four years. Students must select a religion course on their registration form unless they request and receive an exemption under the *Education Act*.

The *Education Act* provides for the following exemption from religious courses and programs for “open access” students:

“[...] no person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board shall be required to take part in any program or course of study in religious education on written application to the Board of,

- a) the parent or guardian of the person;
- b) in the case of a person who is 16 or 17 years old who has withdrawn from parental control, the person himself or herself;
- c) in the case of a person who is 18 years or older, the person himself or herself.”

“Open access” students are “persons who are qualified to be resident pupils in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attend a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic Board”. In other words, “open access” students are students who attend a Catholic secondary school, but whose parents have been public school supporters. A student’s qualification for resident pupil status is based solely on the location of the student and parent/guardian’s residence, and the school board of which the parent/guardian or student (if 18 years or older, or 17 or 17 and withdrawn) is a supporter. If a student satisfies both the residency and supporter criteria, he or she will qualify as a resident pupil and, if attending a Catholic secondary school, will be eligible to be exempt from religious courses of study and programs.

Students who are not “open access” students are not eligible to obtain a religious exemption under the *Education Act* and this procedure.



To assist students, parents or guardians in making a written application for an exemption, a standardized exemption application form shall be made available to students, with information requirements that are sufficient to determine the student's eligibility to the exemption under subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*. The form will also include a general list of programs, activities or course(s) of study that are eligible for the exemption and which the student can select.

Students have the right to request an exemption from any specific religious program, course or activity while retaining the right to participate in other religious programs, courses or activities.

Upon receipt of a completed standardized form, the school will assess the student's eligibility for an exemption.

Once the student's eligibility is confirmed, the exemption will be provided by the school without delay, pressure or other adverse treatment.

Students who apply for the exemption will not be asked to provide any reasons for their request, nor attend any meeting with school or board officials as a precondition to the application being recognized and accepted.

The exemption may apply to religious programs, courses or activities with a substantial component of religious content. For example, exempted students may not be required to participate in prayer and liturgical activities, nor required to attend at religious observances. The school should produce a list of religious programs, courses or activities to which the exemption may apply, and the list should accompany the standardized form. Students, parents or guardians may also question whether other courses, programs or activities are religious education for the purposes of subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*.

Students with exemptions will be given the opportunity to take alternative course or program offerings to the extent reasonably possible in line with ordinary course selection procedures. At the student's request, the school will work with the student to provide information to assist him or her in making an informed decision.

Students with exemptions from religious courses and activities will be treated with dignity and respect.

All exemption requests should be referred to the Principal, who will then forward the application form to the Superintendent of Education. The Superintendent of Education will convene a Committee to review the application to determine if the student is eligible for a Religious Education exemption. The Superintendent will inform the student, parent, or guardian, as applicable, of the Committee decision in accordance with these procedures and the *Education Act*., in writing and in a timely manner.



ENQUIRY PROCESS

School:

- A. Principal to meet and discuss with Guidance, Teaching, Chaplaincy Team Leader, Support Services, etc. and direct them to refer every exemption enquiry from a student and/or their parent(s)/guardian(s) to the Principal (or VP in their absence).
- B. In the interim, Guidance Counsellors will:
 - 1. Schedule the appropriate Religion Course in the students' timetable;
 - 2. Once all students with a Religion Course have had their timetable conflicts resolved, students with an approved religious exemption will be removed from their Religion Course;
 - 3. These students will meet with their Guidance Counsellor to have their timetable adjusted with any available courses scheduled within that period.

Principal:

If/when the student with their parent(s)/guardian(s) accepts an invitation to meet and to discuss the exemption request with the Principal; the conversation should include the following discussion points:

- 1. Programming needs of the child (i.e., timetable options, Individual Education Plan, etc.).
- 2. Catholic schools provide students with an education that includes emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth.
- 3. Inclusion into faith formation is keeping with the expectations of students who graduate from Catholic high schools.
- 4. Catholic schools promote inclusion and non-Catholic students are welcomed into the core faith programme and other activities related to the faith life of the school.
- 5. Curriculum in all subject areas is infused with the beliefs and tenets of the Catholic faith.
- 6. Religion courses are but one aspect of the faith formation, all students are expected to participate fully in all religious activities in the school community including masses, retreats and paraliturgies.
- 7. Catholic schools are called to provide students with a comprehensive religion programme that will influence and mold their lives into the future.



SIMCOE MUSKOKA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Content of Religion Courses:

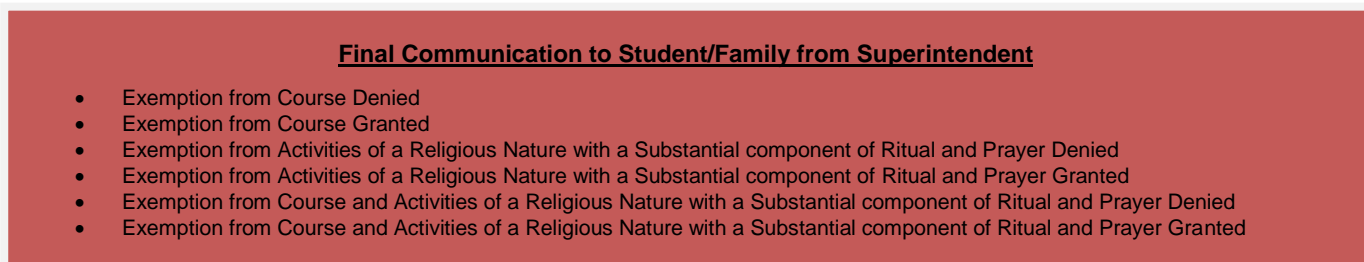
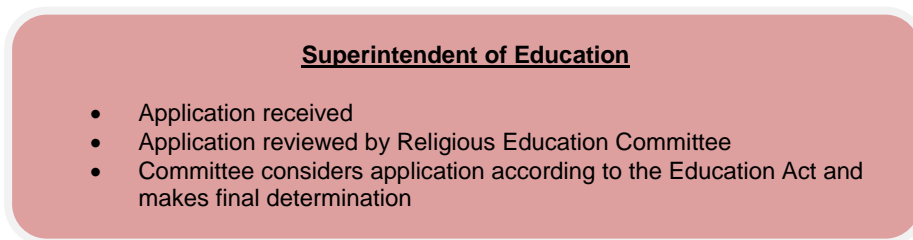
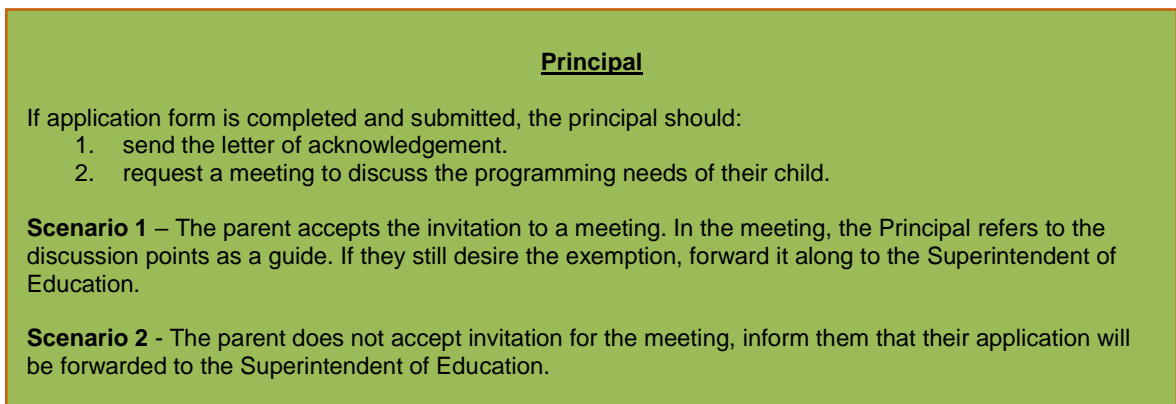
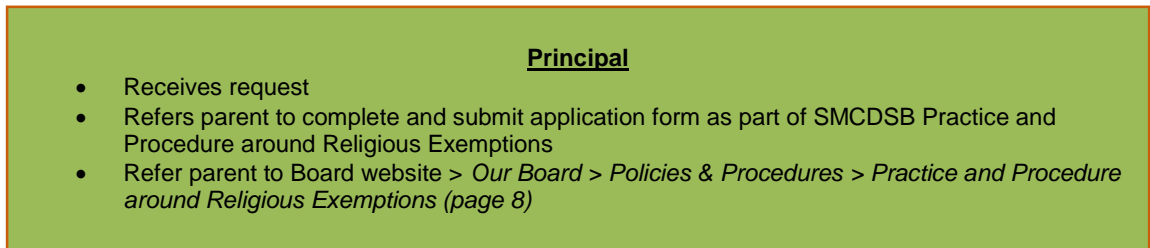
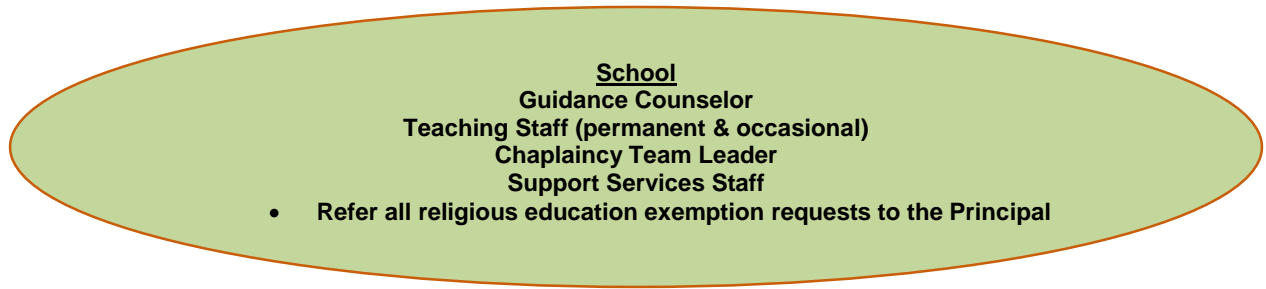
Grade Nine: focuses on the student as an individual and examines the challenges a teenager faces including peer influences and relationships within the context of Catholic teachings.

Grade Ten: Christ and the Church, examines the structure of the Church, the rituals and the meaning behind the various aspects of the liturgy.

Grade Eleven: World Religion, offers a look at other faiths and their components.

Grade Twelve: deals with an array of topics of morality and social justice such as euthanasia, abortion, in-vitro fertilization, capital punishment, cloning, stem cell research within the context of Catholic teachings.

SECONDARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION EXEMPTION REQUEST FLOWCHART





**SECONDARY RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
EXEMPTION REQUEST APPLICATION**

This form must be completed in full and returned along with the appropriate documents to the Superintendent of Education. Application must be received before the start of the semester.

Requests are considered on an annual basis.

STUDENT INFORMATION

Full Name:		Current School:	
Date of birth: (d / m / y)	Grade (Exemption):	Phone:	
Current address:			
City:	Province:	Postal Code:	
Previous Elementary School(s):		How long?	
Previous Secondary School(s):		How long?	

**PARENT/GUARDIAN/ADULT STUDENT MAKING APPLICATION
APPLICATION DEADLINE – PRIOR TO THE START OF THE SEMESTER**

Application Date:			
Parent #1:		Signature:	
Address:			
City:	Province:	Postal Code:	
Home Phone:	Cell Phone:	Bus. Phone:	
Parent #2:		Signature:	
Address:			
City:	Province:	Postal Code:	
Home Phone:	Cell Phone:	Bus. Phone:	

APPLICANT: ATTACH THE FOLLOWING TO APPLICATION AND SUBMIT TO PRINCIPAL

Latest Municipal Tax Assessment (MPAC)

APPLICANT: SELECT THE COURSES AND ACTIVITIES YOU WISH TO BE EXEMPT FROM

- Religion Course Only
- Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer
(if yes, select from list of Activities)
- Religion Course and Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer
- Other: _____

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE SCHOOL

Attach the following:	Timetable: Semester One	Timetable: Semester Two
<input type="checkbox"/> Ontario Student Transcript <input type="checkbox"/> Ontario Student Status Sheet <input type="checkbox"/> Copy of Parent Baptismal Certificate <input type="checkbox"/> Copy of Elementary Registration Form	1. 2. 3. 4.	1. 2. 3. 4.
Principal Signature:		Date:
BOARD OFFICE ONLY		
Committee Decision: Eligible () Not Eligible () Signature: _____ Date: _____		

Routing:

Applicant to Principal

Principal to Superintendent of Education

Principal Checklist for Voluntary Meeting

School: _____ **Date:** _____

Principal: _____

Name of Student: _____ **Grade (exemption):** _____

Parent(s)/Guardian(s) in Attendance: _____

Requesting:

- Religion Course Only
- Catholic Faith Celebration Only
- Religion Course and Catholic Faith Celebration

Reminder to the parent/guardian that the Catholic school system is based on inclusion, and the exemption will exclude the child from fundamental curricular and co-curricular activities in this school.

The following points were presented:

1. Programming needs of the child (i.e., timetable options, Individual Education Plan, etc.)
2. Catholic schools provide students with an education that includes emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual growth.
3. Inclusion into faith formation is keeping with the expectations of students who graduate from Catholic high schools.
4. Catholic schools promote inclusion and non-Catholic students are welcomed into the core faith programme and other activities related to the faith life of the school.
5. Curriculum in all subject areas is infused with the beliefs and tenets of the Catholic faith.
6. Religion courses are but one aspect of the faith formation, all students are expected to participate fully in all religious activities in the school community including masses, retreats and paraliturgies.
7. Catholic schools are called to provide students with a comprehensive religion programme that will influence and mold their lives into the future.

Comments:

Outcome:

- Student is enrolled in Religion Course
- Parent wishes to proceed with religious exemption request
- Parent provided with Secondary Religious Exemption Request Application form
- Other: _____

Signature of Principal: _____

Attached:

- Completed Application

SCHOOL LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #1: Letter of Acknowledgement from Principal]

Date

[Parent/Guardian/Adult Student]
[Address]

Dear [Parent/Guardian/Adult Student],

I am in receipt of your letter [application form], dated [date], requesting your son or daughter [student name] to be exempted from [“quote from parent letter”] at [school name] for the [year-year] school year.

The Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board believes that the purpose of registering a student in any of its high schools is to provide that child with an education that will form them intellectually, physically, emotionally and most importantly spiritually. A student registered in a Catholic school is expected to participate in religion courses in each year of attendance and in all activities related to the faith life of the school including masses, retreats and paraliturgies.

Students who are registered in Catholic schools are required to meet the expectations of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. Our school system promotes inclusion as an important principle and students are not expected to exclude themselves from the core faith programme or other activities related to the faith life of the school they attend.

We believe that religious education courses help to build community within and outside of the school and that in order for students to benefit from a Catholic education; they must be fully immersed in a curriculum based on the beliefs of the Catholic faith. Curriculum in all subject areas is designed to mould, guide and support students in a spiritual journey that will prepare them to be discerning believers, effective communicators, self-directed lifelong learners, collaborative contributors, caring family members and responsible citizens.

[If application form has not already been provided, include:] Should you wish to proceed with your request for an exemption, please be advised that we require you to complete the attached application form, which will be forwarded to the Superintendent of Education.

I would like to offer to meet with you on a voluntary basis to discuss your child’s programming needs and the mission and values of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and its Catholic schools. Should you be open to such a meeting, please contact me at the school to set up a time to discuss your request. Should you not wish to meet with me, please provide me with your completed application form as soon as possible [OR, if the application form has been provided: Should you not wish to meet with me, I will proceed to deliver your application form to the Superintendent of Education. Please advise as soon as possible as to whether you would like to meet with me.]

If you have any further questions, please contact me at the school.

Yours in Christ,

[Name of Principal]
Principal
[Name of School]

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Superintendent], Superintendent of Education – Secondary
OSR File

BOARD LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #2: Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer / Qualifies for Exemption]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Date]

Ms. and Mrs. Smith
[Address]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

I refer to your application of [Date], in which you requested to have your [son/daughter], [Name], exempted from activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer at [Name of School] for the [year-year] school year.

Subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act* provides for an exemption for any “program or course of study in religious education” for a “person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board.”

Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. I understand that your [son/daughter] is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board.

For the reasons given above, your [son/daughter] qualifies for and is granted the exemption under the provisions of the *Education Act*.

In this regard, [Name of Student] will not be required to take part in activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer at [Name of School].

Based on subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, the Board will comply with your request to have [Name of Student] exempt from activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer. In this regard, [Name of Student] will not be required to take part in [school masses, religious retreats and/or other activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer]. Please recognize that there will not be any alteration in the religious or moral education that infuses the remainder of [Name of Student]’s timetable and school observances.

Please note that this approval is for a one-year period and future requests will have to be made on an annual basis to the school principal. If you have any further questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

[Name of Superintendent]
Superintendent of Education, Secondary

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Principal], Principal – [Name of School]
OSR File

BOARD LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #3: Religious Education Course/Qualifies for Exemption]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Date]

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
[Address]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

I refer to your application of [Date], in which you requested to have your [son/daughter], [Name], exempted from the Grade [No.] religious education course at [Name of School] for the [year-year] school year.

Subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act* provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board.”

Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. I understand that your [son/daughter] is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board.

For the reasons given above, your [son/daughter] qualifies for the exemption under the provisions of the *Education Act*.

In this regard, [Name of Student] will not be required to take the Grade [No.] religious education course at [Name of School].

Based on subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, the Board will comply with your request to have [Name of Student] exempt from taking the Grade [No.] religious education course, but there will not be any alteration in the religious or moral education that infuses the remainder of [his/her] timetable and school observances.

Please note that this approval is for a one-year period and future requests will have to be made on an annual basis to the school principal. If you have any further questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

[Name of Superintendent]
Superintendent of Education, Secondary

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Principal], Principal – [Name of School]
OSR File

BOARD LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #4: Religious Education Course and Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer / Qualifies for Exemption]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Date]

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
[Address]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

I refer to your application of [Date], in which you requested to have your [son/daughter], [Name], exempted from the Grade [No.] religious education course and activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer at [Name of School] for the [year-year] school year.

Subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act* provides for an exemption for any “program or course of study in religious education” for a “person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board.”

Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. I understand that your [son/daughter] is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board.

For the reasons given above, your [son/daughter] qualifies for the exemption under the provisions of the *Education Act*.

In this regard, [Name of Student] will not be required to take the Grade [No.] religious education course and take part in activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer at [Name of School].

Based on subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, the Board will comply with your request to have [Name of Student] exempt from taking the Grade [No.] religious education course and activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer. In this regard, [Name of Student] will not be required to take part in [school masses, religious retreats and/or activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer]. Please recognize that there will not be any alteration in the religious or moral education that infuses the remainder of [Name of Student]’s timetable and school observances.

Please note that this approval is for a one-year period and future requests will have to be made on an annual basis to the school principal. If you have any further questions on this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

[Name of Superintendent]
Superintendent of Education, Secondary

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Principal], Principal – [Name of School]
OSR File

BOARD LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #5: Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer / Does Not Qualify for Exemption]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Date]

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
[Address]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

I refer to your application of [Date], in which you requested to have your [son/daughter], [Name], exempted from activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer at [Name of School] for the [year-year] school year.

Subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act* provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board.”

Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. I understand that your [son/daughter] is a Catholic student who attended [Name of Catholic elementary school]. I also understand your [son/daughter] does not qualify to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board.

In light of the above, your [son/daughter] does not qualify for the exemption under subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, and will be expected to enroll in the required religion courses and participate in all required programs and activities.

In the present circumstances, based on subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, the Board cannot comply with your request to have [Student’s Name] exempted from activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer, as [he/she] does not qualify for the exemption under the provisions of the *Education Act*.

The religious expectations and requirements for the full duration of [Name of Student]’s enrolment at the school include the following:

1. [Name of Student] will enroll in a religious education course in each of the four years. All religion education courses are approved by the appropriate Catholic authority. The Government of Ontario recognizes that Religions credits count towards a secondary graduation diploma.
2. [Name of Student] will participate in an annual retreat for the first four years that [he/she] attends the school. The retreat normally takes place during the school day at a site off school property. The chaplaincy leader organizes the annual retreat based on spiritual themes appropriate for adolescents.

3. [Name of Student] will participate in the prayer and liturgical life of the school. Catholic students are expected to participate fully as mandated by their sacramental Baptism.

If you have any further questions in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

[Name of Superintendent]
Superintendent of Education, Secondary

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Principal], Principal – [Name of School]
OSR File

BOARD LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #6: Religious Education Course/Does Not Qualify for Exemption]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Date]

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
[Address]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

I refer to your application of [Date], in which you requested to have your [son/daughter], [Name], exempted from the Grade [No.] religious education course at [Name of School] for the [year-year] school year.

Subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act* provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board.”

Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. I understand that your [son/daughter] is a Catholic student who attended [Name of Catholic elementary school]. I also understand your [son/daughter] does not qualify to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board.

In light of the above, your [son/daughter] does not qualify for the exemption under subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, and will be expected to enroll in the required religion courses and participate in all required programs and activities.

In the present circumstances, based on subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, the Board cannot comply with your request to have [Student’s Name] exempted from taking the Grade [No.] religious education course, as [he/she] does not qualify for the exemption under the provisions of the *Education Act*.

The religious expectations and requirements for the full duration of [Name of Student]’s enrolment at the school include the following:

1. [Name of Student] will enroll in a religious education course in each of the four years. All religious education courses are approved by the appropriate Catholic authority. The Government of Ontario recognizes that religions credits count towards a secondary graduation diploma.
2. [Name of Student] will participate in an annual retreat for the first four years that [he/she] attends the school. The retreat normally takes place during the school day at a site off school property. The chaplaincy leader organizes the annual retreat based on spiritual themes appropriate for adolescents.
3. [Name of Student] will participate in the prayer and liturgical life of the school. Catholic students are expected to participate fully as mandated by their sacramental Baptism.

If you have any further questions in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

[Name of Superintendent]
Superintendent of Education, Secondary

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Principal], Principal – [Name of School]
OSR File

BOARD LETTERHEAD

Sample / Draft

[Template #7: Religious Education Course and Activities of a Religious Nature with a Substantial Component of Ritual and Prayer / Does Not Qualify for Exemption]

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

[Date]

Mr. and Mrs. Smith
[Address]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

I refer to your application of [Date], in which you requested to have your [son/daughter], [Name], exempted from the Grade [No.] religious education course and activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer at [Name of School] for the [year-year] school year.

Subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act* provides for an exemption for a “program or course of study in religious education” for a “person who is qualified to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board who attends a secondary school operated by a Roman Catholic board.”

Please note that this exemption only applies to “open access” students who meet the qualifications in the above provision. I understand that your [son/daughter] is a Catholic student who attended [Name of Catholic elementary school]. I also understand your [son/daughter] does not qualify to be a resident pupil in respect of a secondary school operated by a public board.

In light of the above, your [son/daughter] does not qualify for the exemption under subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, and will be expected to enroll in the required religion courses and participate in all required programs and activities.

In the present circumstances, based on subsection 42(13) of the *Education Act*, the Board cannot comply with your request to have [Student’s Name] exempted from taking the Grade [No.] religious education course and activities of a religious nature with a substantial component of ritual and prayer, as [he/she] does not qualify for the exemption under the provisions of the *Education Act*.

The religious expectations and requirements for the full duration of [Name of Student]’s enrolment at the school include the following:

1. [Name of Student] will enroll in a religious education course in each of the four years. All religion courses are approved by the appropriate Catholic authority. The Government of Ontario recognizes that religions credits count towards a secondary graduation diploma.
2. [Name of Student] will participate in an annual retreat for the first four years that [he/she] attends the school. The retreat normally takes place during the school day at a site off school property. The chaplaincy leader organizes the annual retreat based on spiritual themes appropriate for adolescents.

3. [Name of Student] will participate in the prayer and liturgical life of the school. Catholic students are expected to participate fully as mandated by their sacramental Baptism.

If you have any further questions in this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

[Name of Superintendent]
Superintendent of Education, Secondary

Copy: [Name of Director], Director of Education
[Name of Principal], Principal – [Name of School]
OSR File