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2020 saw the creation of two new standing committees of the CMS. The *Reconciliation in Mathematics* committee was born of the need to coordinate the contributions of the mathematical community to the reconciliation process and to help us eliminate the educational and employment gaps in mathematics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. The *Equity, Diversity and Inclusiveness* (EDI) committee was born of a need to monitor and promote the position and interests of equity-seeking groups in the mathematical community and to ensure their participation at all levels. Both committees were natural next steps, following processes that began long before the pandemic, and conceived in the anticipation that our combined will and fresh charge would push us over the tipping point to diminish these gaps and inequities.

But 2020 instead saw them increase. From the reduced access to education and further marginalization of students in remote communities or without reliable internet access, to the disproportionate negative impact (economic and personal) of the shutdowns on members of underrepresented groups, the pandemic exacerbated our society's problems. The response, from the best of us, was a fiery need to turn our personal shutdown into action.

I am privileged to witness some of this first-hand. I served as President's Delegate on the EDI committee, alongside **Steven Rayan** (Saskatchewan, chair of the EDI committee),

**Habiba Kadiri** (Lethbridge), **Elana Kalashnikov** (Harvard), **Israel Ncube** (Alabama A&M), **Reila Zheng** (Toronto), and **Karen Meagher** (Regina, chair of the Women in Mathematics committee). The EDI committee's regular meetings since its inception have informed and inspired me, and the work it has begun can lead to a shared strategy on EDI for our community across Canada. Most tangibly, and what inspires me to write today, is its hosting at the CMS Winter meeting of a series of themed breakout rooms and a panel discussion.

The four themes were *Challenges faced by caregivers*, *Challenges faced by mathematicians from underrepresented groups*, *Supporting LGBTQ+ mathematicians*, and *Supporting Early Career Researchers*. The breakout rooms were facilitated by the members of the EDI committee together with **Broderick Causley** (McGill, and member of the CRM EDI committee). The conversations were active and the topics wide-ranging, from the difficulties of being inclusive while teaching online, to worries about career impacts playing out over the coming years, to spreading the word about events like [OURFA<sup>2</sup>M<sup>2</sup>](#): the Online Undergraduate Resource Fair for the Advancement in Academia of Marginalized Mathematicians.

The catalyst for this event at the CMS Winter meeting was a [letter](#), published by the European Women in Mathematics (EWM) and which was, on recommendation of the EDI committee, endorsed by the CMS. The letter highlights the unequal impact of the COVID-19 crisis on untenured faculty, women and caregivers, and advocates for proactive, eyes-open, policies to support the vulnerable among us. These range from the immediate (extending contracts, offering teaching releases for caregivers), to the longer term (correcting academic age for parental and other leaves, for all evaluation committees), to the simply respectful (offering flexibility during the crisis to those who need it). Importantly, we, the decision-makers of our community, are asked not to be blind judges, but to take explicit extra steps to particularly retain and support our colleagues from underrepresented groups.



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The question to take up: to what extent have we, in the Canadian mathematical community, adopted the measures recommended in the EWM letter?

The answers we heard at the meeting were as diverse as the participants. One is left with the (probably correct) impression that every department and agency is still scrambling to deal with the present crisis, and not ready to define policies going forward. Some of the most vulnerable members of our community, including postdoctoral fellows and international graduate students, are falling through the cracks – the chasms! – left by this patchwork support.

Moreover, there is real fear that when the crisis has passed, caregivers will find themselves left behind: their research competitiveness diminished by exhausting months spent meeting the massively increased demands of not only their jobs but also their life at home. There were also secondary effects: their graduate students' progress delayed by isolation, both mathematical and social. Can they trust each evaluation committee – for grants, prizes, hiring, tenure or promotion – to individually understand and acknowledge the full weight of the year's sacrifices?

These concerns echoed another: when policies are eventually codified, they often refer to four designated groups: women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and members of visible minorities. Such boxes miss other equity-seeking members of our community, notably those identifying as LGBTQ+. And even when these categories are used, for example to encourage applicants to a position to self-identify, it is often up to each individual hiring committee to find a way to turn the policy from thought into action. In many cases, we are bumbling along with good intentions, but isolated from one another, and unsure who's taking the lead.

Interestingly, some of the clearest directions for action were expressed in a breakout room that veered off-topic, into the challenges of teaching online. Perhaps it is that our classrooms are realms under our control, and we can individually see how to make that realm better. Participants described their concrete steps to making their classes more inclusive, from creating an online environment with links to resources to students from a variety of underrepresented communities, to discussing communication and etiquette in class, to keeping things as low-tech and low-cost as possible. The best went even further: responding to the individual crises of their students with compassion and flexibility, acknowledging and respecting that one-size-fits-all is not an equitable response.

I think perhaps that is the main message I take from the EWM letter, and from these excellent discussions: a reflection on what equity, diversity and inclusiveness really means, to me, individually, as a professor or a committee member or someone in charge of some small part of this massive academic machine. Equity is correcting imbalances. Diversity is seeing and respecting the other. Inclusiveness is reaching out. And (borrowing from a panelist's definition from the hugely successful Fields LGBTQ+Math Day in November): to be an ally is to be an advocate, to take others' problems as your own. We each have our role to play.



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**Episode 1: Dr. Anthony Bonato on being a gay mathematician**

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