

CUT THE CLAUSE

A MOVEMENT FOR INCLUSION IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

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May 4, 2020

Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr
Archdiocese of Cincinnati
100 E. 8th St.
Cincinnati, OH 45202

cc: Lourdes Lambert
Archbishop Alter High School
940 E. David Road
Dayton, OH 45429

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Secretariat of State
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City

Dear Archbishop Schnurr,

We write in response to your May 1 letter to the Archbishop Alter High School community regarding the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's recent dismissal of one of the school's longtime educators after it learned the person is married to another individual of the same sex.

As students, parents, alumni, and friends of the Alter High School community and the greater Catholic, religious, and non-religious communities, we are disappointed and uneasy with the Archdiocese's decision and inherently disagree with it.

Just as importantly, we respectfully reject the necessity and morality of the general contractual language used to justify this teacher's dismissal, as we believe it does not align with the values of an equitable Catholic faith community.

Our hope with this correspondence is to initiate an open, thoughtful, and thorough dialogue between the Archdiocese and the educators and members of the greater Catholic Church who are affected by or disagree with the contractual clause invoked in this teacher's dismissal.

Let us be clear: We do not support any threats or acts of violence or harassment in resolving this matter. Any such behavior against archdiocesan or school personnel runs counter to our movement of ensuring a more just, diverse, and open church and archdiocesan school system for current and future generations.

To that end, we ask the Archdiocese to remove, in perpetuity, the contractual language included in Section 4 of its teacher-minister contract, which reads, in part:

"Teacher-Minister agrees to [...] refrain from any conduct or lifestyle which would reflect discredit on or cause scandal to the School or be in contradiction to Catholic social doctrine or morals [including] ... cohabitation outside marriage; sexual activity out of wedlock; same-sex sexual activity; use of abortion; use of a surrogate mother; use of in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination. [...]"

We also respectfully ask the Archdiocese to develop a comprehensive, transparent, and good-faith plan or inclusion initiative for welcoming LGBTQ+ educators – and all others who are ostracized by this clause – as teachers in its schools. We believe doing so would help the Archdiocese and Church become a more welcoming, inclusive environment for all faculty, students, families, alumni, and supporters.

We understand that upon learning of this Alter teacher's marriage to an individual of the same sex (albeit more than three years ago), the Archdiocese and school felt compelled to act, as is suggested by the teacher-minister contract. But they also had an opportunity not to do so, which we believe would have been the correct decision in this case and going forward.

Since it was added in 2014, this clause has been used to terminate not only this longtime Alter educator and alumnus, but other responsible, respected, and otherwise qualified teachers throughout the diocese. In our view, predicating the firing of an individual on many of the reasons listed in this clause is a morally inconsistent desecration of the Catholic Church's own guidance on social justice, love, acceptance, respect, and forgiveness.

We would further argue it is not judicious to retain a clause that is not practically and equitably enforceable in all its facets, as it is not possible for the Archdiocese to uphold each of these standards when there are no public records or substantial proof of the actions listed therein.

For example: Are unmarried female teachers subjected to virginity checks to ensure they are abstaining from sexual activity? Is it even possible to check unmarried male teachers for the same condition? Are faculty members required to share their medical records to prove they've never received an abortion or been a party to in vitro fertilization? When the Archdiocese discovers that any teacher it hires is married, does it conduct an inquiry into whether that marriage is valid in the Church?

You state in your May 1 letter that the specific actions listed in the teacher-minister contract "cannot be offered to young people as a witness to the faith, no matter the many other outstanding attributes a person may possess." Further, you note that God's plan for human flourishing calls for all archdiocesan teachers to be witness to that in word and deed.

Certainly, the Catholic Church has a longstanding view that the behaviors listed in its conduct clause constitute sins that are incompatible with Catholic teaching. But God calls on all His children – even those individuals the Archdiocese and the Church label as sinners – to be witnesses of Christ to others. His plan for human flourishing simply does not work if we permit blatant prejudices to persist and do not stand up for all of His children and welcome them to the Church and share in the salvation of Christ.

Additionally, we would contend it is disingenuous to assert that an individual with innumerable good qualities has their worth as a teacher or person defined by a singular personal detail – even if that detail constitutes a sin in the eyes of the Church. For are we not all sinners? The behaviors listed in the archdiocesan teaching contract have absolutely no bearing on an individual's ability to teach, particularly when that individual is not an instructor of a theology-based course or responsible for coherently teaching the Church's views.

As such, the personal and private actions the Archdiocese lists in this clause largely do not have a direct or deleterious effect on students or anyone else. It should not matter if an individual teacher is a member of the LGBTQ+ community or resides with their significant other before marriage, so long as the person is a good educator and an overall positive influence on those around them.

Welcoming the many whose behaviors were provided as examples in the conduct clause should be no different from the tack taken with inviting non-Catholics to teach in its schools – we are all saved by the perpetual grace of God. We are all equal in His eyes, bearing witness to His salvation.

In Luke 7:36-50, a "sinful woman" bathes Christ's feet in her tears, dries them with her hair, and anoints them with expensive ointment. When those in attendance question Christ for allowing this, he explains that she has set the greater example for all present, saying, "So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love." By serving Christ as teachers in Catholic schools, individuals exhibit great love. By Christ's own standards, are their sins not forgiven?

In our view, the situation at hand illustrates just how far the Archdiocese has left to go in its pursuit of social justice for all of God's children, despite many years proclaiming it is committed as a universal, faith-based institution to welcoming and protecting all people.

We believe the removal of this conduct clause from the existing teacher-minister contract and a concentrated inclusivity initiative from the Archdiocese are each equally important to healing the fracture this recent situation has caused, as well as in preventing similar situations from arising later on.

Additionally, further meaningful and respectful dialogue between the Archdiocese and the Alter community, as well as the larger Catholic community, is crucial for all Catholic schools to continue as safe havens not only for students, but for all who follow the Catholic faith, including faculty and staff members and the community at large.

We do not expect this movement toward equality to occur quickly or to be without its detractors. But we believe it is a vitally important opportunity for this important institution and its members to demonstrate love, understanding, kindness, and boundless forgiveness, just as Christ taught. We implore the Archdiocese: Cut the clause, and begin to make amends.

Until that day comes, we will continue to stand, fight, and pray for equality for all –including educators – in the Archdiocese and the Roman Catholic Church.

We hope that you will consider our words carefully, with prayer and thoughtful reflection. Additionally, we invite you to visit our website, www.cuttheclause.com, to learn more about this movement and the people who support it.

Yours in Christ,

Michael Shuey
Alter Class of 2010

Alexis Winters
Alter Class of 2012

Rachel Woeste
Alter Class of 2015

Co-signed

Joe Colavincenzo
Alter Class of 2010

Paul Sobecki
Alter Class of 2007

*"The business of finding fault is very easy; the business of doing better, very difficult."
–St. Francis De Sales, Patron Saint of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati*