News



by Dan Morris-Young

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Parish leaders and ministers at Holy Redeemer Parish in La Pine, Oregon, and nearby Holy Trinity Mission in Sunriver, Oregon, must sign a statement explicitly pledging to "not attend worship services" of Holy Communion Evangelical Catholic Church in Bend, Oregon, nor "take part in its social activities" or they will be "in effect, resigning from their ministry," confirmed the diocese's vicar general.

Presumably authored by Bishop Liam Cary of Baker, Oregon, and carried in Feb. 17 bulletins, an "Addendum to the Affirmation of Faith: La Pine and Sunriver" requires signed assent from parish council members, religious education teachers, staff members, officers "of all Catholic associations" and liturgical ministers including "readers, singers, [and] distributors of Holy Communion."

Persons familiar with the development told NCR on Feb. 25 that emails notifying some parishioners of their removal from parish service had been issued as early as late last week.

Multiple requests for comment from Fr. Paul Antao, pastor at La Pine and Sunriver, were not acknowledged.

> "Those ministers who choose not to sign are in effect, resigning from their ministry. This will be our only response to this matter."
>
> — Fr. Rick Fischer
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In an email, diocesan vicar general Fr. Rick Fischer wrote:

"In answer to your questions about the addendum: 1) The addendum is limited to La Pine and Sunriver. 2) The reason for the issuance is clearly stated in the first paragraph of the addendum. 3) Those ministers who choose not to sign are in effect, resigning from their ministry. This will be our only response to this matter."

The addendum language indicates that La Pine and Sunriver were singled out because "Holy Redeemer and Holy Trinity parishioners who knew James Radloff as their pastor for many years have been conflicted and confused by appeals from his supporters to leave behind Catholic loyalty to their bishop and walk away from Catholic identity. For five years now this disunifying dynamic has undermined the faith of the Catholic communities in La Pine and Sunriver."

The text describes what it calls former diocesan priest Radloff's "dramatic departure from the Catholic Church" and his "promptly" taking the helm of "a worshipping community explicitly opposed to the integrity of Catholic teaching and publicly antagonistic to the bishop charged to uphold it."

Radloff had served as pastor in La Pine and Sunriver from 1993 to 2007.

Establishment of Holy Communion Evangelical Church in Bend was spearheaded in 2014 by disgruntled Catholics, many from St. Francis of Assisi and others following a lengthy, high-profile standoff between Radloff and Cary. Radloff was asked to head the congregation.

The controversy became public in October 2013 when Radloff announced he had appealed Cary's removal of him as pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, the diocese's largest parish, to the Vatican Congregation for Clergy.

Contacted by NCR, Radloff said neither he nor members of Holy Communion Church seek to recruit Roman Catholics from their parish affiliations.

Since the La Pine-Sunriver addendum was unveiled, he said, he has received several reactions from friends and parishioners supporting him personally and perplexed by its motivation.

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Holy Communion Church's council president, Andy Zook, emailed NCR, "The 'Addendum' simply reaffirms our decision to be an independent Catholic Church."

Holy Communion affiliates with the Evangelical Catholic Church. Founded in 1997, the Evangelical Catholic Church claims much theology and devotionals in common with the Latin-rite church, but it ordains married and single male and female deacons, priests and bishops; accepts gay marriage; fosters receipt of Communion by the divorced and remarried and allows birth control.

Four La Pine and Sunriver parishioners contacted by NCR declined public comment.

Declaring that signing the addendum was not an option, one Holy Redeemer parishioner who asked for anonymity called it "troublesome" and disputed its depiction of Radloff's leaving the Roman Catholic Church.

A former Holy Trinity member, Kathie Thatcher, also called parts of the addendum "grossly incorrect."

"Fr. Radloff did not willingly leave his position and his church. He was ousted by the bishop and falsely accused of actions which were never made public," emailed Thatcher who joined Holy Communion Church "at its inception."

"From what I have heard from current Holy Trinity Church members, this is an extremely divisive issue," added the Sunriver resident.

Radloff's Vatican appeal was denied in a Jan. 31, 2014, ruling. The decision also confirmed that Cary did not need to divulge why Radloff had been canonically ousted 21 months after being named St. Francis pastor. Radloff had petitioned to force Cary to make the reasons public.

Radloff claimed Cary had rebuffed efforts at reconciliation, mediation and dialogue.

At the time of Radloff's removal as pastor, Cary wrote that the cleric remained a priest in good standing and had done nothing illegal. Cary refused to discuss why Radloff was forced out, writing that he was "not at liberty" to do so.

The La Pine-Sunriver mandated commitment is an add-on to the diocesan Affirmation of Faith required of lay church leaders and ministers originally promulgated in 2009 by Cary's predecessor, Bishop Robert Vasa, who now heads the Santa Rosa Diocese.

[Dan Morris-Young is NCR's West Coast correspondent.]

This story appears in the **Bend controversy** feature series. View the full series.