News



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The decision by the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas to deny admission of a kindergarten student with same-sex parents has stirred division within the parish and rekindled tensions between the Catholic Church and LGBT community.

Parishioners at St. Ann Catholic Church, in Prairie Village, Kansas, wrote a letter March 1 asking Archbishop Joseph Naumann and Superintendent of Schools Kathleen O'Hara to "prayerfully reconsider" the decision earlier this year to deny a same-sex couple's child enrollment in kindergarten at the parish school, and its general policy barring any children of same-sex unions admittance into the archdiocese's 42 Catholic schools.

"It is our belief that Christ's message of inclusion, acceptance, mercy, and love should first and foremost guide such decisions," read the letter. A corresponding petition has been signed by more than 1,200 people, about half of them members of St. Ann, according to the Kansas City Star.

The parishioners wrote that St. Ann has a "welcoming culture," and that they try to assist one another without first checking for conformance with church teaching. "We are inclusive and try to refrain from judgment."

The enrollment decision earlier this year has sparked "much discussion" and "strong opinions on this matter," said Fr. Craig Maxim, pastor at St. Ann, in a Feb. 27 letter to the school community. The Star published a copy of the letter. Maxim said he consulted with the archdiocese, "which advised against admission."

The archdiocese in a statement defended its decision, saying it felt it was not respectful to individuals who disagree with "essential elements" of church moral teaching, "nor is it fair, loving or compassionate to place their children in an educational environment where the values of the parents and the core principles of the school conflict."

"The Church teaches that individuals with same sex attraction should be treated with dignity. However, the challenge regarding same sex couples and our Catholic schools is that same sex parents cannot model behaviors and attitudes regarding marriage and sexual morality consistent with essential components of the Church's teachings," the archdiocese said.

The parishioners' letter contended that such a position "lacks the compassion and mercy of Christ's message," nor is it evenly applied. They pointed to other possible parental situations inconsistent with church teaching, such as divorced parents, those remarried without receiving an annulment and others who had in vitro fertilization or vasectomy medical procedures. They also noted the school does not block admittance to non-Catholic families.

"Presumably, these families are not in marriages that are conformant to the teachings of the Church," the parishioners said. "We respectfully ask you to consider why non-conformity to some of the Church's teachings rise to the level of refusing admission to children, while others do not."

The Kansas City Archdiocese declined to respond to questions about when the policy was first adopted, and how many children have been affected by it. The archdiocese added that Naumann, who is chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, was expected to address the matter in his column Friday in the diocesan newspaper, The Leaven.

Maxim, in his letter to the St. Ann school community, said he communicated concerns to the archdiocese, and added that any effort at further dialogue "is **not** an attempt to undermine Church doctrine but to find common understanding to meet the ever-changing landscape of our society."

"As your pastor, I am distressed over the division this sensitive and complex issue has caused within our school and church," Maxim wrote.

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The situation at St. Ann has brought national attention to this parish in suburban Kansas City since it became public last week. It is the latest Catholic school embroiled by enrollment decisions regarding same-sex parents.

Last year, the pastor at a Catholic elementary school in the Charleston, South Carolina, informed a lesbian couple their children would not be admitted because of their marriage.

Nearly a decade ago, the Boston Archdiocese announced a new policy stating it would not "discriminate against or exclude any categories of students" in the admissions process for its Catholic schools.

The policy grew out of a controversy in May 2010 when a pastor denied admission of an 8-year-old boy into St. Paul School in Hingham, Massachusetts, because his parents were lesbians. In a blog post responding to the situation, Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley wrote at the time, "Catholic schools exist for the good of the children and our admission standards must reflect that. We have never had categories of people who were excluded."

He added, "While there are legitimate reasons that might lead to a decision not to admit a child, I believe all would agree that the good of the child must always be our primary concern."

Two months earlier, then-Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput supported the decision of a pastor and elementary school principal who rejected admittance of two girls, ages 5 and 3, after it was discovered their parents were a lesbian couple.

Chaput, now archbishop in Philadelphia, wrote in a column for the Denver Catholic Register that "Our schools are meant to be 'partners in faith' with parents. If parents don't respect the beliefs of the church, or live in a manner that openly rejects those beliefs, then partnering with those parents becomes very difficult, if not impossible."

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