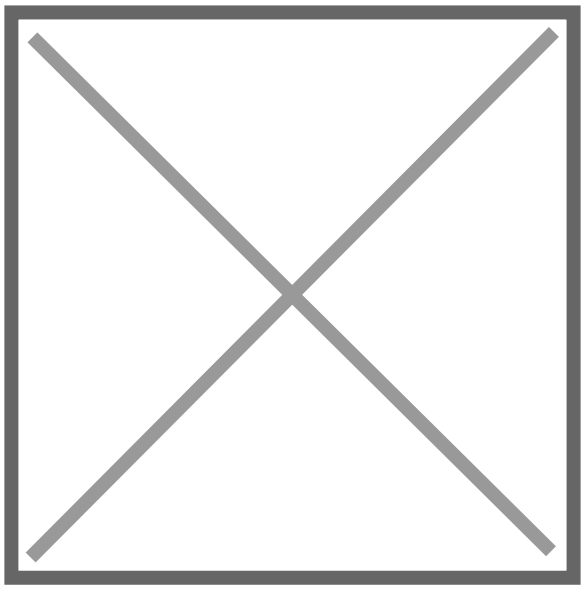
News



Former head women's basketball coach Ashlie Langlinais (back row, far left, in gray) poses with the 2019-20 varsity women's basketball team at St. Dominic Savio High School. (Provided photo)



by Lucy Grindon

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Ashlie Langlinais was fired in July from her position as head women's basketball coach at St. Dominic Savio High School in Austin, Texas, after starting a petition for

the removal of a pastor after he made an anti-LGBTQ post on social media.

In a post from the Our Lady of Lourdes Roman Catholic Church Facebook account, the pastor, Fr. Andre Metrejean, criticized the NFL's New Orleans Saints for lighting up the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in rainbow colors in honor of the 51st anniversary of the Stonewall riots. Our Lady of Lourdes is located in Erath, Louisiana, a part of the Diocese of Lafayette.

Langlinais, who is married to a woman, said she reached out privately to Lafayette's Bishop J. Douglas Deshotel before creating the petition. Deshotel gave KLFY news a response, citing the catechism's teaching on people with "homosexual tendencies," namely: "They must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity."

But Deshotel's lack of action to adequately address Metrejean's behavior, as Langlinais put it, prompted her to seek public support by creating a petition with the assistance of Faithful America, a national online Christian group centered around social justice. The Faithful America petition has now gained more than 12,000 signatures. The petition's text also mentions an alleged racist remark by Metrejean as another reason he should be removed after he allegedly told an Erath resident his church did not need to worry about COVID-19 because "the virus only affects Black people."

On Aug. 6, Langlinais delivered a hard copy of the petition to Deshotel's office, while a group of Metrejean's supporters stood outside holding signs in support of the priest, the Acadiana Advocate reported. A petition in support of Metrejean has also been started on Change.org, gathering more than 5,500 signatures.

St. Dominic Savio Principal Enrique Garcia gave no explanation when he initially notified Langlinais by email that her employment had ended. When she reached out asking why she was fired, he responded according to an email obtained by NCR, "it is because of the very manner that you are making demands of a neighboring diocese and it's [sic] bishop with respect to one of his priests that we will not be able to ask you back. This is not how we interact with your fellow diocese and bishops."

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Langlinais has started another petition with Faithful America, asking Austin bishop Joe Vásquez to "stop the termination of Catholic school employees who speak out for

justice in the Church or are in same-sex marriages." This petition has received more than 11,600 signatures. Vásquez declined NCR's request for an interview.

The Supreme Court's recent ruling in favor of the "ministerial exception" in a case brought against two Los Angeles Catholic elementary schools makes it nearly impossible for many Catholic school employees to win discrimination lawsuits.

Langlinais said that while she was raised in the Louisiana parish, she no longer considers herself Catholic.

"As a gay person who grew up in that community, my motivation has always been thinking of those kids that still live there, that don't really have a choice of what religion they want to follow, that are taken to that church by their parents, and see these types of things said. It's just dangerous rhetoric, and it hurts kids, it hurts families. So my motivation to speak up has been for them, to be their voice," she told NCR.

Some students and alumni have also accused St. Dominic Savio High School of fostering an unwelcoming environment for LGBTQ students. After hearing of Langlinais' firing, Nani Zapata, who played last year on the varsity women's basketball team, wrote on the school's Facebook page that she had encountered a "sexist, homophobic, and single minded" atmosphere there.

Maya Chalil, another varsity basketball player who graduated last spring, said Langlinais's firing left her feeling disillusioned about the school and Catholicism, and affected all her teammates.

"We're all family on the basketball team," she told NCR. Chalil noted that the majority of the team's 2020 graduates signed the new petition asking the bishop of Austin to stop firings of Catholic school employees who speak out in support of LGBTQ concerns.

Beside the obligation she felt to speak on behalf of young people growing up at Our Lady of Lourdes, Langlinais said another reason she made her petitions asking for Metrejean's removal was that she felt obligated to be a good role model for her students at St. Dominic Savio.

"My advice to them would be to speak up, to advocate for yourself. And I feel like if I'm going to give that advice to one of my athletes, that in order not to be

hypocritical and to lead by example, I had to do the same thing in my life," she said.

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