News



The Pittsburgh Pride parade crosses the Andy Warhol Bridge from downtown Pittsburgh June 3. Bishop David Zubik canceled a planned June 11 Mass in solidarity with LGBTQ people after a flyer advertising it as a "Pride Mass" was circulated on social media and anti-LGBTQ Catholic influencers urged their followers to contact him (AP/Gene J. Puskar)



by Aleja Hertzler-McCain

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

June 14, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pittsburgh Bishop David Zubik canceled a Corpus Christi Mass in solidarity with LGBTQ people, to be held on Duquesne University's campus, after a flyer advertising it as a "Pride Mass" was circulated on social media and anti-LGBTQ Catholic influencers urged their followers to contact the prelate.

The announcement of the Mass' cancellation comes as conservatives have rallied around boycotting various companies because of their LGBTQ inclusion initiatives, including Target and Bud Light.

"Many of the responses to the flyer jumped to the conclusion that I gave approval to this event. I did not," wrote Zubik in a letter that the bishop sent to clergy and others who emailed him about the Mass, saying he and Duquesne University president Ken Gormley had not known about the Mass.

"Many of the responses also used condemning and threatening, and some might say hateful, language not in keeping with Christian charity, especially of the Lord’s command 'to love one another as I have loved you,'" wrote Zubik.

The Pittsburgh-based group Catholics for Change in Our Church has held monthly social justice Masses at Duquesne University for more than two years. The group was formed in the wake of a 2018 grand jury report in which more than 300 Pennsylvania priests were accused of sexual assault over some 70 years.



Pittsburgh Bishop David Zubik at the 2018 fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore (CNS/Bob Roller)

The group invited the LGBTQ Ministries at St. Joseph the Worker and St. Mary Magdalene parishes, Pax Christi and the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, a church renewal group, to collaborate on the June 11 Mass.

"It was mistakenly called a Pride Mass on a flyer created by one of the people of one of the groups helping to plan the Mass. The correct designation was a Mass in

solidarity with LGBTQ Catholics," said Kevin Hayes, president of the board of Catholics for Change in Our Church.

The group held a Mass in solidarity with LGBTQ Catholics at Duquesne last year with support from campus minister and Spiritan Fr. Bill Christy, so Hayes said that he did not expect any problems this year.

"The purpose was to stand in solidarity with LGBTQ Catholics and affirm and encourage LGBTQ Catholics as beloved sons and daughters of a loving God," said Hayes, who expressed confusion about the meaning of a Pride Mass. "The Mass was not going to promote any ideas or initiatives contrary to church teaching," he said.

When NCR asked Gormley for comment, Gabriel Welsch, vice president of marketing and communications for Duquesne, referred to Zubik's letter.

Fr. Doug Boyd, the priest who was supposed to celebrate the June 11 Mass, said that Zubik has been intentional about outreach to the LGBTQ community and that the keyword that "set everybody off was 'Pride.' "

"I'm a little bit conservative, but they're my friends," said Boyd, explaining his participation in the Mass.

Boyd, a hospital chaplain and team chaplain for the University of Pittsburgh football team, said that the "Pride" language was problematic because it connotes "not just identity but practicing and living a lifestyle that's contrary to our faith."

Advertisement

Zubik's letter expressed similar sentiments. "We welcome, listen and accompany but cannot endorse behavior contrary to what we know to be God’s law," Zubik wrote.

In a May 30 blog post about whether Catholics can celebrate Pride month, Jesuit Fr. James Martin wrote that Pride month is "a recognition of the human dignity of a group of people who have, for centuries, been treated with contempt, rejection and violence."

Martin wrote that it is "especially important for churches to mark Pride Month since much of the rejection that LGBTQ people have faced has been motivated by

Christianity," including LGBTQ teens becoming homeless after their parents kick them out for religious reasons.

Boyd said he thanked Zubik for taking "some heat off" of the priests and deacons involved by canceling the Mass.

"I'm worried about people," said Boyd. "I just never saw the emotional health so bad," he said, explaining that he sees the angry messages that Zubik received as people taking out the hurt and anger they feel in other areas of their life on this issue.

Consuelo "Chelo" Cruz-Martínez, a mother of two adult children who are part of the LGBTQ community, said she was "very hurt" that the Mass was canceled.

"As a mother, you are not sending me the message that you are an open church, that you are welcoming my children," said Cruz-Martínez, a psychologist and a former Sacred Heart sister who now volunteers in various Pittsburgh Catholic ministries. "I don't feel like the institution is supporting the many who are leaving the church because they do not feel at home."

"What is the problem with having a Mass to say to the gay community: We love you, you are welcome, you are a human being worthy of respect?" she asked.

Cruz-Martínez said she has participated in Pittsburgh's Pride parade every year since she arrived in the city as an immigrant from Mexico, as part of her longtime interest in defending gay rights.

"I want this situation that we're living through to be a moment to reassess our following of Jesus," said Cruz-Martínez.

"Who are we truly following? If our following of Jesus is true and deep, then we are called to live out love and unconditionally accept our sisters, brothers and siblings," she said.

A version of this story appeared in the **June 23-July 6, 2023** print issue under the headline: Pittsburgh's Bishop Zubik cancels LGBTQ Mass after pressure online.