News



Pictured is the campus of Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit. Ralph Martin and Eduardo Echeverria, prominent theologians who taught there and who have criticized Pope Francis, have been fired by Archbishop Edward Weisenburger of Detroit. (Wikimedia Commons/CC-by-sa/3.0/Andrew Jameson)

Lauretta Brown

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

July 26, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Archbishop Edward Weisenburger of Detroit has fired three prominent theologians from their longstanding roles at Sacred Heart Major Seminary.

Ralph Martin, Eduardo Echeverria and Edward Peters have been vocal critics of Pope Francis in the past, raising concerns about what they say was confusion and ambiguity caused by some of the late pope's actions and writings.

On July 23, Martin, 82, was terminated after working at the seminary since 2002, and Echeverria, 74, was terminated after teaching at the seminary since 2003. Peters, a canon lawyer in his late 60s, posted on X at 5:55 p.m. EST July 25 that Weisenberger had terminated his teaching contract at the seminary "this week."

Read this next: Pope Francis' critics at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit are vocal online

The professors' firing has drawn attention after Weisenburger's June restriction of 13 churches in the archdiocese from saying Mass in the extraordinary form, known as the traditional Latin Mass. Following his March installation, the archbishop invoked Pope Francis' 2021 apostolic letter, Traditiones Custodes, to limit the Latin Mass to four churches in the archdiocese. In a document that was later removed from the public portion of the archdiocese's website, the archbishop also banned the *ad orientem* posture for saying Mass.

Angela Brown, communications director for the Archdiocese of Detroit, told OSV News in an email that "the Archdiocese of Detroit does not comment on archdiocesan or seminary personnel matters."

Archbishops Edward Weisenburger and Allen Vigneron

Archbishop Edward Weisenburger, named by Pope Francis Feb. 11 to succeed retiring Detroit Archbishop Allen Vigneron, shares a laugh with Vigneron after the retiring prelate handed him a Detroit Lions hat, along with a Pewabic tile with an image of Blessed Solanus Casey, during a news conference. Former head of the

Diocese of Tucson, Ariz., Weisenburger was installed March 18 as Detroit's sixth archbishop. (OSV News/Valaurian Waller, Detroit Catholic)

In a letter to Catholics following the 2018 sex abuse scandal involving then-Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Martin wrote, "Pope Francis has said and done some wonderful things (I teach his Apostolic Exhortation 'The Joy of the Gospel' in one of my classes), but he also has said and done some things that are confusing and seem to have led to a growth of confusion and disunity in the Church."

He also wrote in response to a January 2024 remark from Pope Francis that he liked "to think of hell as empty," that "while the Pope is only offering his personal speculation about the possibility of hell being empty, which he hopes it is, and he is clear that this is not official Church teaching, it is nevertheless still extremely damaging" because "it plays into a widespread sympathy towards a heresy called 'universalism,' which teaches that perhaps — or certainly — everyone will eventually end up in heaven."

Echeverria wrote in a 2019 revision to his 2015 book *Pope Francis: The Legacy of Vatican II*, that "I have now come to accept that Francis has contributed to the current crisis in the Church — doctrinal, moral, and ecclesial — due to the lack of clarity, ambiguity of his words and actions, one-sidedness in formulating issues, and a tendency for demeaning Christian doctrine and the moral law."

In a 2022 interview with Crisis, Echeverria said that he did not believe Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation Amoris Laetitia was orthodox, not because of Pope Francis' view of marriage, but because of his "understanding of pastoral reasoning and his understanding of moral reasoning that informs his view of how to be pastoral to people."

Peters in a 2018 blog post expressed "grave concerns" about Pope Francis that year formally changing the official Catholic Church teaching on the death penalty. The pope called the practice "an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person" and said it was "inadmissible" in all cases. Peters wrote that many seem to "think that this ... papal assertion effectively demands the faithful's immediate acceptance" but "no pope can, by a single ordinary act," he said, "assert something with anything like the equivalent force for Christian consciences."

Peters also has been among critics of how Pope Francis handled the issue of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, particularly in the McCarrick case.

Advertisement

Martin was a professor of theology and director of graduate programs in the new evangelization, and Echeverria served as a professor of theology and philosophy. Peters joined the seminary faculty as a professor of canon law in 2005 and held the Edmund Cardinal Szoka Chair, named for a former archbishop of Detroit (1981-1990) who also served for many years at the Vatican.

Martin, who founded and leads the Catholic charismatic organization Renewal Ministries, sent OSV News a public statement providing "the best explanation I have regarding my recent termination from Sacred Heart Major Seminary."

"Archbishop Weisenburger told me that he was terminating my position at the seminary effective immediately," he wrote July 24. "When I asked him for an explanation, he said he didn't think it would be helpful to give any specifics but mentioned something about having concerns about my theological perspectives."

He wrote that the news "came as a shock" after his 23 years at the seminary. "I want what I say about this situation to be truthful, but I also do not want to unnecessarily contribute to current polarization in the Church," he added.

Echeverria did not immediately respond to OSV News' request for comment, but told the National Catholic Register July 24 that "no reason had been provided to him for his termination and that he could not say more due to signing a non-disclosure agreement."

In his X post, Peters said, "I have retained counsel. Except to offer my prayers for those affected by this news and to ask for theirs in return, I have no further comment at this time."

Martin has a master's in theology from Sacred Heart Major Seminary, a licentiate in sacred theology from the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C., and a doctorate in sacred theology in systematic theology from the Pontifical Faculty of St. Thomas Aquinas (The Angelicum) in Rome. Pope Benedict XVI appointed him as a consultor to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization in 2011 and as an "expert" for the World Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization in 2012. He is the host of EWTN's "The Choices We Face" and an author of many books, including *A*

Life in the Spirit: A Memoir about his time as a leader in the early days of the Catholic charismatic renewal.

Echeverria holds a doctorate in philosophy from the Free University in Amsterdam and a licentiate in sacred theology from the University of St. Thomas Aquinas (The Angelicum) in Rome. He has written several books advocating ecumenical dialogue including *Dialogue of Love: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic Ecumenist* and *Are We Together?: A Roman Catholic Analyzes Evangelical Protestants*.

Peters, who has a civil law degree from the University of Missouri at Columbia School of Law, earned a doctorate in canon law at the Catholic University of America in Washington in 1990. For the next 12 years, he served in various diocesan positions including as director of canonical affairs, defender of the bond and a judge for diocesan and appellate tribunals of the dioceses of Duluth, Minnesota and San Diego.

Before joining the faculty of Sacred Heart in 2005, he taught for four years at the Institute for Pastoral Theology at what was then Ave Maria College in Michigan.

Peters maintains a website dedicated to canon law, www.canonlaw.info, and he has published several monographs on canon law and related topics, including *A Modern Guide to Indulgences, Excommunication and the Catholic Church* and *Annulments & the Catholic Church: Straight Answers to Tough Questions*. He also has written for a wide variety of religious and secular publications over the years. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI named Peters a referendary, or consultant, to the Apostolic Signatura, the Holy See's highest court under the pope himself. He was the first layperson to serve in this role.

Read this next: Detroit archbishop joins Catholic procession calling for just immigration policies