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Catholic pastor fires principal for trivial reasons

Tom Gallagher | Jul. 1, 2009 NCR Today

If the facts are as described in this Newsday story [1], it appears like another act of pure clericalism by Father Dan Murphy, pastor of St. Saviour Church in Brooklyn diocese, at its finest and backed up by the diocese.

> "The Park Slope priest who dismissed a popular veteran Catholic school principal was upset he had to pay to attend two school fund-raising galas, the Daily News has learned.
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> That's among the beefs that St. Saviour church pastor the Rev. Daniel Murphy had with James Flanagan, who was let go this spring after 25 years as principal of the church's elementary school, according to an e-mail to parents from Flanagan's adviser.
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> "As pastor, I should have received a personal invitation with a complimentary ticket," Murphy wrote in six pages of complaints against the principal about the $200 he had to shell out for the March 2007 and October 2008 events."
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> Flanagan said the charges against him had nothing to do with his leadership of the school.
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> "It was the approach of, 'Let's throw all of this against the wall, and maybe some of it will stick,'" said Flanagan, who told parents Murphy was unhappy with his stand against tuition hikes.
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> Flanagan has asked the Brooklyn Diocese to mediate so that he can keep his job until he retires in 2010.
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> Brooklyn Diocese spokesman Father Kieran Harrington said the diocese was waiting to hear the details of Flanagan's mediation request, but getting his job back was "off the table" because the pastor has the final word on hiring at a parochial school."

Apparently in the Brooklyn diocese, whatever "Father says goes" even if "Father is plainly wrong." Weird. Antiquated. Unjust. Typical.

It's painful to read these stories as this plain vanilla personality clash was entirely manageable had basic management steps been taken months before. Had this been the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis, the Justice in Employment policy [2] would have kicked-in and the rights of Principal Flanagan would have been protected and the pastor's "complaints" would have been evaluated in a formal process.

It's also ironic that the Brooklyn diocesan schools are turning into "academies," wherein the pastor is removed from managing schools [3] and will focus on religion -- presumably, the religion the pastors will focus on will include theological concepts like justice, dignity of the human person, rights of workers, serving the common good... you get the idea.

The Brooklyn diocese should do the right thing: Keep Principal Flanagan employed -- somewhere -- until

retirement. The diocese should adopt the Justice in Employment policy immediately and train pastors, priests and all employees that there is a new way to treat one another in the Catholic workplace and it is not the way in which Father Murphy treated Principal Flanagan.

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Links:
[1] http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/brooklyn/2009/07/01/2009-07-01_parish_pastor_fired_catholic_school_principal_over_tickett_to_fundraiser.html#ixzz0K0a9lvTD&C
[2] http://ncronline.org/news/mission-management-archdiocese-policy-models-justice-workplace
[3] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/brooklyn-catholic-schools-reopen-academies