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Employment and the church

by Tom Gallagher

NCR Today

I've recently written about the fact that too many dioceses fail to provide unemployment benefits for terminated employees, as well as an article describing a Catholic approach to "justice in employment" as found in the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis

In Wisconsin, the state Supreme Court is expected to decide whether a fired Catholic school teacher can sue for age discrimination, or if such lawsuits against the church are barred.

Catholic schools say they have a First Amendment right to choose their own spiritual leaders and that includes elementary school teachers who lead students in prayer and teach about religion.

They say that allowing courts and administrative agencies to rule on employment-related complaints such as age, gender and racial discrimination would infringe on that right.

A state appeals court last year refused to provide a blanket exemption for teachers, saying the state has an interest in enforcing anti-discrimination laws.

It seems increasingly clear that Catholic-sponsored schools have greater latitude in hiring priests and nuns, and even perhaps, lay people who teach exclusively religion. However, lay people teaching in Catholic-sponsored schools should not lose their civil rights simply because that stand in front of a chalk board or computer screen in a building with a publicly displayed crucifix.

Jesuit Fr. Joe Fessio Fired Again

In other employment news, I recently blogged about the conservative Jesuit, Fr. Joe Fessio, who has been serving as "theologian in residence" at Tom Monahan's pet project, Ave Maria University.

Today's Miami Herald is reporting that Fr. Fessio has been fired again by Ave Maria University.

"[Fr. Fessio] said in an e-mail that his second firing stemmed from private criticism he had made about the university's financial security."

Now that was a complicated employment arrangement.

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