

Workers must vow not to break church tenets

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WASHINGTON -- Catholic Charities of Washington has added language to a hiring letter for new employees explicitly requiring that they "not violate the principles or tenets of the Catholic faith."

Employees of the Archdiocese of Washington's social service arm "are expected to act in ways that promote the best interest of our faith and church," reads a March 3 letter from Catholic Charities' Human Resources Manager Terrance Pollard. New employees will be asked to sign the letter.

The policy comes a week after the District of Columbia legalized same-sex marriage, prompting Catholic Charities to drop spousal benefits for new employees rather than cover same-sex spouses.

Susan Gibbs, a spokeswoman for the archdiocese, said the two policies are unrelated, and the letter simply adds language that is already covered during new employee orientation.

The addition was prompted by a 2008 case in Virginia, Gibbs said, in which a Catholic Charities branch helped a 16-year-old abandoned immigrant obtain an abortion, which is prohibited by the church.

"That was a wake-up call," Gibbs said.

Employees will not be evaluated differently under the policy, which concerns what they do on the job -- not their private lives -- Gibbs said, adding that Catholic Charities employees non-Catholics. The Obama administration is currently studying whether it is legal for religious charities to discriminate in hiring based on religion when using federal funds.

Asked what would happen if an employee takes a public stand against church teaching, Gibbs said such matters will be handled on a "case-by-case basis."

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