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The firing of gay people at Catholic schools reveals church hypocrisy

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NCR Today

The recent firing of Catholic school employees because they are gay is a sad and perplexing issue. *The New York Times* ran a long front-page story on the trend Thursday. There is a large measure of hypocrisy in this action by the church, and everybody knows it.

The catalyst for the firings is the gay employees' marriage or intent to marry. Strangely enough, pastors had no problem hiring gay teachers, gay principals, gay athletic directors, gay janitors and other needed employees for decades. In many, many cases, the parents, students, pastors and priests knew the employees were gay but made no protest because they were performing services with competence and reliability.

This accommodation existed also for other church-related employees, such as organists, choir directors and liturgists. I suspect if all such church employees who happen to be gay suddenly disappeared, Sunday Mass in many churches in many dioceses would be a silent, bleak event.

Now that gays are marrying their longtime partners thanks to changes in federal and state laws, they are facing dismissal from their jobs. The alleged reason for dismissal is the fact that they are not following the church teaching on homosexuality. The real reason is that the word is out; the public knows they are gay -- and the church is embarrassed.

But the affected employees weren't following church teaching on this issue before, and somehow pastors and bishops were able to live with this less-than-perfect situation. Now, they feel, it's time to impose a strict interpretation of the law. That's where the hypocrisy, the double standard, is so obvious. Secrecy has been the chronic disease of Catholicism for a long time.

Pope Francis has said we are a church of sinners -- all of us, including him. Somehow the teaching church -- that is, pope and bishops -- are going to have to accept the hard truth in that statement and cease imposing frayed, outworn laws that the greater body of the church no longer accepts.

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