

# Denver archbishop defends Boulder school's decision on children of lesbians

DENVER – The decision to refuse re-enrollment at a Boulder Catholic school to two children of lesbian parents was the only outcome that was fair to the children, their teachers, school parents and “the authentic faith of the church,” said Denver Archbishop Charles J. Chaput.

“Our schools are meant to be ‘partners in faith’ with parents,” the archbishop said in a column published in the March 10 issue of the Denver Catholic Register, the archdiocesan newspaper. “If parents don’t respect the beliefs of the church, or live in a manner that openly rejects those beliefs, then partnering with those parents becomes very difficult, if not impossible.

“It also places unfair stress on the children, who find themselves caught in the middle, and on their teachers, who have an obligation to teach the authentic faith of the church,” he added.

Archbishop Chaput, whose archdiocese includes Boulder, was commenting on the case of two children whose parents, a lesbian couple, were enrolling them at Sacred Heart of Jesus School. The couple was told that their older child, who was being enrolled for kindergarten next year, could attend kindergarten but could not continue into first grade after that. The younger child could be enrolled in preschool for next year but could not continue into kindergarten the following year, school officials said.

The primary purpose of Catholic schools, the archbishop said, is “to form students in Catholic faith, Catholic morality and Catholic social values.” But he said that did not mean the schools only accept Catholic students with married parents.

“Many of our schools also accept students of other faiths and no faith, and from single-parent and divorced-parent families,” he said. “These students are always welcome so long as their parents support the Catholic mission of the school and do

not offer a serious counterwitness to that mission in their actions.”

Archbishop Chaput said archdiocesan policy on school admissions “was followed faithfully” by the staff at Sacred Heart of Jesus School.

The policy reads in part: “Parents living in open discord with Catholic teaching in areas of faith and morals unfortunately choose by their actions to disqualify their children from enrollment. To allow children in these circumstances to continue in our school would be a cause of confusion for the student in that what they are being taught in school conflicts with what they experience in the home.”

Father Bill Breslin, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, had a similar message in a March 5 note to parishioners and school parents.

“If a child of gay parents comes to our school, and we teach that gay marriage is against the will of God, then the child will think that we are saying their parents are bad,” Father Breslin said. “We don’t want to put any child in that tough position – nor do we want to put the parents, or the teachers, at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church.”

Archbishop Chaput noted in his column that “the church does not claim that people with a homosexual orientation are ‘bad,’ or that their children are less loved by God.”

“Quite the opposite,” he said. “But what the church does teach is that sexual intimacy by anyone outside marriage is wrong; that marriage is a sacramental covenant; and that marriage can only occur between a man and a woman.”

Father Breslin said he did not understand why “good parents (would) want their children to learn something they don’t believe in.”

“There are so many schools in Boulder that see the meaning of sexuality in an entirely different way than the Catholic Church does,” he added. “Why not send their child there?”

Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of Dignity USA, which describes itself as an organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Catholics but has no official church status, said in a statement that the school’s decision “cannot be

understood as anything other than discrimination on the back of a child.”

“The archdiocese has chosen to selectively enforce Catholic rules about families while trampling on core Catholic values of compassion equality and love,” she added. “This is tragic for the family involved and for all who turn to church officials for moral guidance.”