

Jesuits at Indianapolis school, archbishop at odds over gay employee

WASHINGTON — The Archbishop of Indianapolis issued a decree June 21 against a Jesuit school that refused to dismiss a gay employee, saying that “with great sadness” the archdiocese no longer recognizes it as a Catholic institution.

Indianapolis Archbishop Charles C. Thompson and Brebeuf Jesuit Preparatory School, administered by the Midwest Province of the Society of Jesus, have been at odds over the teacher for two years. A statement released by the Jesuit superior in charge of the province said the archdiocese had verbally requested that the school “not renew this teacher’s contract because this teacher’s marital status does not conform to church doctrine.”

When the Jesuits decided not to comply, the archdiocese took action.

Jesuit Father Brian Paulson, who is the provincial, or superior, for the Midwest Jesuits said in a June 20 letter explaining the rift, that he disagreed “with the necessity and prudence” of the archdiocese’s decision.

The teacher does not teach religion, is a longtime valued employee, and “we recognize that at times some people who are associated with our mission make personal moral decisions at variance with church doctrine; we do our best to help them grow in holiness, all of us being loved sinners who desire to follow Jesus,” Father Paulson said in the letter.

That’s why Brebeuf “declined to honor the archdiocese’s expectation that the school dismiss this teacher,” the letter said.

A statement released by the archdiocese when the decree was issued said that “all those who minister in Catholic educational institutions carry out an important ministry in communicating the fullness of Catholic teaching to students both by word and action inside and outside the classroom. It is their duty and privilege to ensure

that students receive instruction in Catholic doctrine and practice. To effectively bear witness to Christ, whether they teach religion or not, all ministers in their professional and private lives must convey and be supportive of Catholic Church teaching.”

The decree says that Brebeuf Jesuit “by its own selection, can no longer use the name Catholic and will no longer be identified or recognized as a Catholic institution by the Archdiocese of Indianapolis nor included in the listing of The Official Catholic Directory.”

The Midwest Jesuits, through the provincial, said they will be appealing the decree locally and, if necessary, through “hierarchical recourse to the Vatican.” Even though archdiocesan representatives may no longer choose to attend events or formal functions at the school, “Brebeuf Jesuit still affirms its identity and mission as a Catholic Jesuit school and the Midwest Jesuits still regard it as a sponsored work,” said the letter issued by Father Paulson.

Last year, a different Catholic school in the archdiocese placed a guidance counselor on paid administrative leave after someone showed the administration a copy of her marriage license. In an August 2018 letter, Archbishop Thompson said the employee was “living in a civil marriage to another woman that is not valid in the eyes of the church,” but employees are given clear expectations that include supporting the teachings of the church.

“There is nothing in church teaching that says being gay or lesbian is a sin,” however, “marriage is a permanent partnership between one man and one woman,” he wrote.

A June 20 letter sent by the school’s board of trustees to the Jesuit community at Brebeuf said that following the archdiocese’s wishes would have established a “concerning” precedent that could have affected the school’s autonomy.

“To our knowledge, the Archdiocese of Indianapolis’ direct insertion into an employment matter of a school governed by a religious order is unprecedented,” the letter said. “What’s more, we also recognize the harm that adhering to this mandate would cause our highly capable and qualified teachers and staff. As an institution

with a mission to develop men and women for others, our intent has been to do the right thing by the people we employ while preserving our authority as an independent, Catholic Jesuit school.”

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