NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Bishops: It's time to cut loose

Kate Childs Graham | Jan. 28, 2010

Most weekends, I wake up early and tip-toe downstairs before my partner stirs. I flip open my computer and browse through the instant play selections on Netflix, hunting to find a movie to check off my never-seen/must-see list. Last weekend, the selection was "Footloose."

Now, before we get up-in-arms about what a crime it is that I've never seen this classic, just breathe deep and try to understand that the film came out the year I was born. It is but a tragic accident that my appreciation for the genius of Kevin Bacon and John Lithgow is only now being realized.

And for those of you sorry saps who are where I was just days ago and have yet to view the screen-splendor of "Footloose," be ware, this article contains a few spoilers.

As I settled in and waited for the video to buffer, I was fully prepared to indulge in the cheesy tunes, ridiculous (and yet constantly reoccurring) styles and gymnasticized dancing of the 1980s. I wasn't prepared, however, to find myself hooked by the film's plotline.

Ren McCormack is a teenager who moves from Chicago to a small town where the local government banned dancing and rock music, with the fierce support of the town's pastor, Rev. Shaw Moore. Rev. Moore's son, you see, had died in a car accident on his way home from a night of drinking and rock-and-roll. Adamant that his daughter would not meet the same fate, Rev. Moore preached that rock-and-roll music and dancing were merely a gateway to "easy sexuality and relaxed morality."

Ren then decides that the school should have a senior dance. But first, he must convince the town council and Rev. Moore. At a town council meeting, Ren reads from the Bible, quoting scripture passage after scripture passage that encourages dancing. In the end, Rev. Moore supports the dance. From the pulpit, he makes this speech:

> I'm standing up here before you today with a very troubled heart. You see, my friends I've always insisted on taking responsibility for your lives. But, I'm really like a first-time parent who makes mistakes and tries to learn from them. And like that parent I find myself at that moment when I have to decide: do I hold on or do I trust you to yourselves?
>
> Let go and hope that you've understood at least some of my lessons. If we don't start trusting our children how will they ever become trustworthy?

And that got me thinking, what could "Footloose" teach the leaders of the Catholic church?

Rev. Moore's impetus for banning dance and rock-and-roll was full of good intentions. He wanted to stop the town's teens from being hurt -- a laudable effort. Much like Rev. Moore, I believe that many church teachings, particularly around gender, sex and sexuality, began with good intentions. In excluding women from leadership,

for instance, the bishops of yore were aspiring to do what they thought Christ would do (though I believe Christ would have done exactly the opposite). And you can't blame them for that.

Quickly though, Rev. Moore's good intentions transformed into wielding power for the sake of power. He himself even lost sight of why he stood so firmly opposed to something he once enjoyed. But he thought that letting go, admitting he was wrong, would show signs of weakness. The church hierarchy has been in this position, too. Their unwillingness to reverse their teaching on condom use for people living with HIV is but one example. At some point it's no longer about protecting people, it's about the fear of losing power and seeming weak.

Ultimately, Rev. Moore is able to release his fear-filled grip -- and cut loose, if you will -- because he realized that by ignoring the wants and needs of the people, he was driving a wedge between himself and those he served. There is no doubt in my mind, and the number of people leaving the church confirms, that the church hierarchy's unwillingness to revamp its teachings on gender, sex and sexuality is driving a wedge between the hierarchy and the faithful.

Rev. Moore was able to cut loose from his distrust and power. And it's not that everyone's lives were perfect because of it, because not every choice is the right one. It's that in cutting loose everyone is free to follow their conscience. And that type of trust brings a community together.

Bishops, perhaps it's time to cut loose.

And, so you'll have it in your head all day (if you don't already), I'll leave you with this:

Kate Childs Graham writes for **ReligionDispatches.org** [1] *and* **YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com** [2]. *She also serves on the Women?s Ordination Conference board of directors and the Call to Action Next Generation Leadership Team.*

Source URL (retrieved on *03/11/2014 - 10:31*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/bishops-its-time-cut-loose

Links:
[1] http://ReligionDispatches.org
[2] http://YoungAdultCatholics-Blog.com