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# Boulder parents: 'They told us in church to love everyone'

Thomas C. Fox | Mar. 24, 2010

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Cathy Clark (Fox photo)

The pastor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Boulder, Colo., earlier this month informed a lesbian couple, active in the parish for three years and with two young girls in preschool that their children would not be able to attend the elementary school beginning in one year. The decision, leaked to the media apparently by a teacher at the school, has caused uproar in the community, and divide the parish.

The women shared their story [1]with *NCR* editor Tom Fox. The pastor, Fr. William Breslin, explained his decision. [2]

Fox interviewed a number of parents with children at the school to see how the decision is affecting their families. Following is the second of these interviews, edited for length and clarity.

*Chris and Cathy Clark are married with three children, two in the Sacred Heart of Jesus elementary school.*

**NCR: Chris, what is your family connection to Sacred Heart?**

**Chris:** We've got three kids. We've been there for 11 years and our youngest is in second grade right now. We have a daughter in the public high school and another kid in sixth grade.

**Cathy:**tAnd he would like to leave now.

**NCR: Are you members of the parish?**

**Chris:**tNo, we've been going to St. Thomas Aquinas, [a neighboring parish]. We now have two young children, 13 and under, and they're talking about this and upset with it. The first day our sixth-grade son, Aidan, said, "Dad, they told us in church that we're to love everyone, even gay people. So what's going on?" That was his expression.

Fr. Bill [Sacred Heart pastor Fr. William Breslin] and the archbishop [Charles Chaput of Denver] are in this together. They are monolithic and they are calling all the shots. It is my impression that their priority is to enforce their policy, and that it's more important for them to have not only the last word, but the only word. That's more important than children, teachers, parents or anything else. When you have a situation where there is no possibility of us having any input, it's not only bad for us, it's bad for them.

**Cathy:**tA lot of people want to talk to Archbishop Chaput or send letters. We've been through other situations at the school. You don't get a response. It's pretty much closed. We can't talk about it. It's very secret. Everything is very secret and if you don't like it, they don't really care if you leave. That's pretty much the attitude that

we've gotten. Other families have left because they were upset about other things, and they just said, "OK, we are out of here."

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**Chris:**tThe priest we did our pre-marriage counseling with in San Francisco told us at one point that he was assisting Salvadoran refugees. He said, "If it was up to the FBI, I would be in jail." I was just blown away with how cool that was. He worked with a lot of labor union and labor issues in San Francisco. We really loved that. Here it is different. If we were in some other city, perhaps we could move to another school or place, but the Archdiocese of Denver is the problem. The buck should stop there. Somehow, some act should be taken, but there is just nothing we can do.

**Cathy:**tIt is sad because after 9/11, a lot of people left the school for financial reasons. People had lost their jobs. The economy was bad here. Then over the last few years, they had a marketing group that had been really working to build up the school and preschool. Now the preschool is packed and is a feeder into the kindergarten. The first three grades are pretty full now and school was just humming along. The preschool was doing great.

**NCR: Are you implying that you think that this incident is going to cause a change in enrollment?**

**Cathy:**tI think it will hurt enrollment. They run ads showing kids of different ethnic backgrounds to show how diverse we are, implying that it's a welcome place for everyone. Yes, I think it is. But now my kids didn't even want to go into Target without putting a jacket over their Sacred Heart uniforms because they are so embarrassed. They are afraid to be seen wearing their uniforms.

**NCR: Wearing the Sacred Heart uniforms?**

**Cathy:**tYes, they don't want to be seen wearing their uniforms.

**NCR: Your children are how old?**

**Cathy:**tI have a sixth grader and a second grader, and I have an older one.

**NCR: Presumably the second grader has very little understanding of this.**

**Cathy:**tThey know something. Some at the fourth grade level are aware, particularly if they have older siblings. The excuse the parish used to get rid of the children [of the lesbian couple] is that they would be taught that homosexual or gay marriage is bad. I asked my daughter yesterday who went through the entire nine years there, "Did they ever talk to you about gay marriage at all?" They barely do sex ed. They do girls in a room and boys in a room, and just go over bodily stuff in fifth grade. That's it. They never talked about homosexuality, but now they are all talking about it because of Fr. Bill.

There have been other lesbian couples at Sacred Heart. The last lesbian couple that was there had two children at the school. One of the moms was an assistant coach for basketball with other parents. The couple was at all the games and all the school functions. They were there for four or five years. Then this couple came and they've been at the school now for two to three years.
The decision was a mistake, but clearly it's going to be hard for him to retract. Fr. Bill feels like he's a martyr.

[Tom Fox is NCR editor. His e-mail address is tfox@ncronline.org.]

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