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After losing school job, gay teacher loses church job

Elizabethe Holland St. Louis Post-Dispatch | Mar. 5, 2012

FLORISSANT, Mo. -- A Catholic school music teacher who was fired after church officials learned he planned to marry his male partner [1] has been fired from his other job as a music director at a suburban Catholic church.

Al Fischer, 46, was told by a priest at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne Catholic Church in Florissant that he could no longer work as one of the parish's part-time music directors, a paid position he's held for several years, according to Fischer's partner, Charlie Robin.

The reason given by the priest, according to Robin, was that Fischer's firing and pending marriage had become "too public of an issue." The pastor at St. Rose could not be reached for comment.

Fischer declined to comment, and a spokeswoman for the Archdiocese of St. Louis said in an email that Fischer "was relieved of his duties [at St. Rose] when he publicly demonstrated a life inconsistent with Catholic teaching."

The spokeswoman said expectations for church employees are laid out in "the Christian Witness Statement that is on the first page of the Parish Employee Handbook." The email said the witness statement applies to all employees of the archdiocese, parishes and schools.

Fischer was fired Feb. 17 from his job as music teacher at St. Ann Catholic School in Normandy, Mo., where he'd taught for four years. Several sources have said Fischer's sexual orientation was well known at the school.

According to Robin, officials first took action against Fischer after a representative of the archdiocese overheard Fischer talking to co-workers about the couple's plan to marry in New York City on March 9.

Robin said Fischer signed a Christian Witness Statement at St. Ann, but that he was never asked to sign such a document at St. Rose.

The witness statement says all who serve in Catholic education should, among other requirements, "not take a public position contrary to the Catholic Church" and "demonstrate a public life consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church."

Robin said he was particularly upset over the firing from St. Rose, where Robin is a cantor and the two have attended Mass for years and are pictured as a couple in the parish directory.

"He's not up there demanding the liturgy to be pro-gay," Robin said. "Al is not causing this ruckus. Al is doing his best to stay above all this because he's more hurt than anything."

Elizabethe Holland writes for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch in St. Louis.

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