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Long Island bishop returns petition from ostracized gay parishioner

Jamie Manson | Apr. 25, 2013 NCR Today

There's a strange update to a story I reported in *NCR* [1] earlier this month.

As some will remember, Nicholas Coppola was stripped from his ministries at his Long Island, N.Y., parish after an anonymous letter sent to the bishop complained he had legally married his longtime partner. In response, Faithful America created a petition asking Long Island Bishop William Murphy to reinstate Coppola and "make it clear that faithful gay and lesbian Catholics are welcome to participate fully in parish life in your diocese."

After collecting more than 18,500 signatures, Coppola delivered the petitions to the diocesan headquarters in Rockville Centre, N.Y. He was supported by the religion and values staff of GLAAD, an advocacy group for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Coppola was met in the vestibule of the diocesan building by associate risk manager Francis McGuinness, who took the printed pages of signatures but did not invite Coppola inside. McGuinness said neither Bishop Murphy nor the diocesan communications officer were in the office.

Hours later, the diocese issued a statement saying in part, "The Catholic Church recognizes that all persons share equally in the dignity of being human ... This does not however justify the creation of a new definition for marriage."

But now Bishop Murphy has offered a bizarre response of his own.

The diocese returned all 18,500 signatures by mail with a cover letter [2] that simply read, in all caps, "FROM YOUR FAITHFUL ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP." The bishop didn't mail the petition to Coppola, GLAAD or Faithful America, but to a different faith advocacy organization, who then contacted Faithful America.

Apparently, the request of 18,500 named Catholics didn't even compel Bishop Murphy to respond with a complete sentence. And yet, one anonymous letter of complaint about Coppola's volunteer service to his parish was enough to make the bishop to strip him of his ministries.

The GLAAD website has [3] more on this story and Coppola's response.

Coppola continues to collect signatures for his own petition at Change.org [4], where he asked Cardinal Timothy Dolan to "break bread" with him and his family.

Coppola created the petition in response to Dolan's highly publicized admission on national television that he loves gays and lesbians and that Roman Catholic leaders "got to do better" at listening to gays and lesbians.

But with dismissive, dehumanizing responses like Bishop Murphy's, is it any wonder few Catholic gays and lesbians buy Dolan's claims?

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