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

Catholic school fires gay teacher after he marries partner

Maureen Fiedler | Aug. 12, 2013 NCR Today

This may be a test case for Pope Francis' famous statement, "Who am I to judge?"

St. Lucy's Priory High School, a Benedictine institution in the Los Angeles suburb of Glendora, judged and fired an English instructor, Ken Bencomo, because he and his longtime partner married in July. They were part of the wave of gay and lesbian couples who married after the Supreme Court overturned Proposition 8 and essentially legalized same-sex marriage in California.

Bencomo is not new at St. Lucy's. He has taught there for more than 16 years. He was a popular teacher, chaired the school's English department, served as yearbook moderator and as a dance coach. His same-sex relationship was no secret before the wedding, according to his attorney, Patrick McGarrigle. But the wedding made the local paper, the *Inland Valley Daily Bulletin*. That may have been what led to the firing: According to McGarrigle, Bencomo was fired because his marriage was "in public and violated the church's teaching."

So it was OK for Bencomo to be in an unmarried same-sex relationship (or at least not get fired because of it), but it is not OK that he married? The phrase "double standard" comes to mind.

With all these wrinkles, it is not surprising that Brittany Littleton, 23, an alumna of St. Lucy's, started an online petition [1] to ask school administrators to "reverse this act of prejudice and give him his job back." As of Aug. 12, it had garnered more than 57,000 signatures.

Legal action is pending as well. McGarrigle said he sees this as a potential test case for times when religious institutions say they can hire and fire based on principles of faith.

The school issued a statement saying while St. Lucy's "does not discriminate against teachers or other school employees based on their private lifestyle choices, public displays of behavior that are directly contrary to church teachings are inconsistent with these values." It added, "These values are incorporated into the contractual obligations of each of our instructors and other employees."

But, according to McGarrigle, Bencomo was fired because "he engaged in a lawful act that the school now believes -- or at least asserts -- was one step too far."

This could become a new legal "test case" about religious institutions and same-sex marriage, which is now legal in 13 states and the District of Columbia.

But whatever the outcome of legal proceedings, the school needs to reinstate Bencomo with deep apologies. I recommend the heading of the apology be: "Who are we to judge?"

Source URL (retrieved on *09/01/2015 - 09:47*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/catholic-school-fires-gay-teacher-after-he-marries-partner

Links:

[1] http://www.change.org/petitions/st-lucy-s-priory-high-school-give-ken-bencomo-his-job-back