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Catholic high school fires teacher who applied for gay marriage license

David Gibson Religion News Service | Dec. 9, 2013

Michael Griffin says it was no secret that he is gay at the suburban Philadelphia Catholic high school where he taught for more than a decade. But last week when he told administrators at Holy Ghost Preparatory School that he was going to marry his partner, he was fired.

The episode is the latest in a string of similar incidents, and it came just a week after New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan said the church is not "anti-gay" but has been "outmarketed" on the issue of gay marriage.

In this case, Griffin, 35, an alumnus of Holy Ghost who taught languages there for 12 years, was dismissed Friday in a meeting with the school president, Fr. James McCloskey, and the principal, Jeffrey Danilak. Griffin had emailed Danilak earlier in the week to say he might be late for an in-service day Friday because he was applying for a marriage license with his partner in New Jersey, a state that legalized gay marriage this year.

Later Friday, McCloskey and Danilak told Griffin that if he intended to go through with the marriage, he would be fired.

Griffin protested. It was already well known in the school that he is gay; he and his partner, Vincent Giannetto, both wear rings; a school administrator came to the reception for their civil union in 2008; and the pair frequently attended school parties as a couple, including a big fundraiser in April.

"To me, that was much more public than me e-mailing the principal, so I don't understand, if (they) were going to fire me, why not in April, why not for the civil union, why not at the first time I brought my partner to the school? That's why it's sort of a shock to me," he told *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

But McCloskey said in a statement to the newspaper that Griffin's action violated the terms of his contract, "which requires all faculty and staff to follow the teachings of the church as a condition of their employment."

"In discussion with Mr. Griffin, he acknowledged that he was aware of this provision in his contract, yet he said that he intended to go ahead with the ceremony," McCloskey said. "Regretfully, we informed Mr. Griffin that we have no choice but to terminate his contract effective immediately."

Holy Ghost prep is a private all-boys high school in Bensalem, Pa., just north of Philadelphia. It is operated by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit religious order and is independent of the Philadelphia archdiocese.

Catholic leaders have come under fire for a number of episodes in which gays and lesbians have been dismissed from positions in Catholic institutions. Pope Francis seemed to complicate matters for the hierarchy this year when he said Catholics should not be too quick to judge gay people or to make opposition to gay rights their top priority.

Speaking on "Meet the Press" Dec. 1, after Illinois became the latest state to legalize gay marriage, Dolan said he thought the church was losing the argument on gay marriage because "maybe we've been outmarketed

sometimes."

"We've been caricatured as being anti-gay," he added. He said that was not the case and that the church is only supporting "traditional marriage."

But, he said, "when you have forces like Hollywood, when you have forces like politicians, when you have forces like some opinion-molders that are behind it, it's a tough battle."

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