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## It's time for the hierarchy to catch up to the laity on LGBT issues

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NCR Today

As I was glancing at my *Washington Post* on Friday morning, I was dumbfounded by this headline: "Gay patient says Catholic chaplain refused him last rites." The story focuses on Ronald Plishka, who was admitted to MedStar Washington Hospital Center after a heart attack and asked for a priest when -- after 24 hours -- he became concerned that he might not make it.

Plishka, 63, said he was an altar boy when he was young and now regularly attends Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. He said he believes in the sacraments and asked for the anointing of the sick, including Communion.

A priest named Fr. Brian Coelho responded to his request, and when they engaged in conversation, Plishka revealed that he is gay. In fact, he had started to talk about Pope Francis and how his "who am I to judge?" attitude toward LGBT people heartened him.

Then, someone else came in the room. It was at that point the priest refused to continue with the last rites, including Communion, the *Post* reports. That led to a confrontation and some name-calling as the priest departed.

This story is a stunner. It joins the stories of several people who have been fired from Catholic schools because they married a gay or lesbian partner in a state where such unions are legal.

It seems that there are plenty of priests and/or school administrators who think they have the right to judge.

I suppose these school administrators or priests think these married LGBT people are now publicly living in sin because they got married rather than continuing to live together (often public knowledge in the school). If so, it's a peculiar attitude toward marriage, which is considered morally desirable for heterosexual couples. But, I wonder, do these administrators ask heterosexual teachers about their sex lives and possible transgressions? I doubt it.

Did the priest at Washington Hospital Center think that just being gay is sinful? Did he refuse the last rites because Plishka would not renounce who he is? It's not clear.

But enough already! It's way past time for the hierarchy of the church to catch up with the laity on LGBT issues. Or maybe just catch up with Pope Francis, who said, "Who am I to judge?"

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