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# DIOCESE *of* GAYLORD

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October 30, 2024

Dear St. Francis of Assisi Parishioners,

I write to you today, mindful that your parish community is experiencing upset following the termination of employment of Mr. Fred Szczepanski. As personnel matters have a high degree of confidentiality, there is only so much that can be said. However, given the public nature of news stories and social media commentary that have circulated, I believe it is important to offer the following points for clarity. Please understand that these points are being made in light of the confirmation given by Mr. Szczepanski in an October 29, 2024, news article that he entered into a same-sex marriage in 2020, a fact that only recently came to light to Fr. Lingaur and myself:

- Employees of the Diocese of Gaylord consent to a ministerial agreement that states they will adhere to the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is instituted by God and therefore in its nature cannot be changed. Marriage is a permanent, faithful and exclusive covenant between one man and one woman, designed by God for the good of the spouses and rearing of children.
- When a Catholic violates the teaching on marriage in a public act that is contrary to the will of God, Pastors are called to shepherd such souls in a way that points them toward reconciliation and mercy.
- No one is “kicked out of the church for being gay.”
- A public act of same-sex marriage is a formal recognition that a relationship is more than friendship, and thereby jeopardizes a ministerial agreement for employment. While we are all weak sinners, serious sins against chastity require sacramental reconciliation and a firm purpose of amendment, as stated in our act of contrition.
- It is essential to know that all are welcome by Christ in his Church. When a person is unable to receive communion because of serious sin, by baptism they are still every bit a member of the body of Christ and should be welcomed with love at the liturgy, hear the Word of God proclaimed, and, instead of receiving Holy Communion, receive a blessing from the priest presider. The Lord’s grace is always at work.

As Christians, we are governed by Divine Revelation. We may be tempted to think, “things are changing, and the Church has to keep up with the times.” I would encourage us all to trust in the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Fundamental truths do not change with time. As sinners, we will always be in need of God’s mercy and love. Let us strive, as our Lord did, to always conform our will to the Divine Will... and never stop loving each other.

In Christ our Life!

Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh  
Bishop of Gaylord