



MARK FARRELL

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Supervisor Mark Farrell's statement on the legislation he will introduce at today's Board of Supervisors meeting that urges the Archdiocese of San Francisco to respect the rights of teachers and administrators

"I am a proud Catholic. Proud to have been born and raised here in San Francisco within our Catholic School system, extremely proud to have been educated and influenced so greatly by the Jesuits, and proud to be part of a practicing Catholic family.

However, these past few weeks have been some of the most challenging weeks of my life in the Catholic Church, and I know I am not alone. At a time when Pope Francis is giving so many of us inside and outside of the Church such great hope, recent local events have overshadowed the inspiration coming from Rome.

Whether the decision at certain parishes to disallow young women from serving as altar girls, to stopping the practice of providing blessings to those who have not received their First Holy Communion, to distributing pamphlets to students as young as the 2nd grade asking about masturbation, birth control and sodomy, or the decision to impose "morality" clauses in teacher's contracts.

I believe in, and honor, the separation of church and state that Thomas Jefferson first coined and which is rooted in the 1st Amendment to our United States Constitution. As much as I may agree or disagree with the beliefs espoused by any religion or religious organization, Catholic or otherwise, I don't believe it is the place of government to speak out against any belief system, unless, of course, it is contrary to our core values and laws as a society. After all, membership is voluntary and men and women are free to join or leave of their own free will. However, when any organization, religious or otherwise, places mandates on their employees that are in stark contrast to, and appear to violate, our recognized laws, then I believe we have a responsibility as leaders in our government, even if we are legally handcuffed from acting, to speak out and give voice to those that are affected.

First and foremost, on their face, these recent decisions are an affront to the values most of the residents of this City, in good conscience, hold dear. This is true both of their content and the manner in which they were communicated. In so many ways, our adherence and defense of these values define us as a City. Inclusion over exclusion, tolerance over discrimination, commitment to respect for the individual person, and promotion of the common good are values that make us who we are.

Our Catholic Church most certainly has the right to insure that the Catholic faith is taught and upheld in our Catholic schools, and students are taught this doctrine. However, for a pastor to deny young women the ability to serve as altar girls discredits

and dishonors the incredible contribution women make in our Church, and misses the point that we should, in my opinion, be encouraging more young individuals to become people of faith, boys and girls, men and women.

And, to require teachers to sign a contract which requires them to follow 100% of Catholic Church teachings outside of school, and to “affirm and believe” many of the practices the Church discourages as “gravely evil” crosses the line. The list includes, among others, “homosexual relations” and “reproductive technology.” First of all, I personally question these teachings. It doesn’t mean that I am not Catholic, or a “bad” Catholic, but that my informed conscience tells me otherwise on a few select issues. For example, I simply don’t know what we say to those teachers who are members of our LGBT community, or those teachers who, after struggling, were able to bring life into this world through reproductive technologies. What about teachers who have brothers, sisters, children, or close friends that are LGBT or have employed artificial reproductive technologies to have a child. What do we say to them? You are not welcome in our Church and in our schools? I don’t think so! In San Francisco, we stand up for and support our LGBT community, and we honor and embrace those who proactively choose to bring life into this world.

What has made this particularly challenging is that these events are coming at a time when so many inside and outside the Catholic community around the world have been inspired by Pope Francis -- A Pope who has shunned the traditional comforts of the Papacy to focus on delivering a message of simplicity and service to his Church. A Pope who last summer famously stated, “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?” A Pope who has not changed Church teachings, but has drastically changed the tone of the Church and how it approaches questions about Church teaching.

Juxtapose our Pope’s message of inclusion and dialog with the exclusionary and authoritative tone which marks recent communications. Moreover, the hot-button topics which are the focus of these communications, almost all relating to sexuality, are only a small part of what the Catholic Church espouses. Where are other key concerns of the Church in these communications -- respect toward and promoting the dignity of all people, especially those traditionally marginalized, opposing the death penalty; promoting economic opportunity for all, and in particular those negatively affected by race or poverty; supporting care for immigrants; combating the growing prevalence of gun violence; and battling economic inequality.

The messages coming from Pope Francis and our local Archdiocese could not be more at odds in their tone and approach, and this causes confusion over what the real message of the Church is. This confusion can inhibit positive engagement in the work of the Church. This is unfortunate when there is a constant need for active and positive participation by members of our local faith community to combat the many significant issues facing us in San Francisco. We need to be galvanized not divided in addressing the issues that face us. Whether it be the recent incidents of violence on our streets, our growing homeless population, or simply ministering to those less fortunate, in many respects I would suggest San Francisco needs an active Catholic community, a community that has been a pillar for San Francisco for generations. Our needs are great, and there is such an amazing opportunity for our local faith community to serve, I hope we can move forward in a positive way. As Pope Francis stated, “I prefer a Church

which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

I expect as a legislator, and pray as a practicing Catholic, that the recent controversial events are resolved in a manner that honors the incredible contributions of the teachers in our Catholic Schools, recognizes the rights of the Catholic Church, and both respects and embodies the values which define us as San Franciscans.

The resolution that I am introducing today first and foremost expresses support for the incredible teachers of our Catholic Schools in San Francisco, recognizes the autonomy of the Catholic Church, and above all else encourages our local church and teachers to acknowledge both sides, and provides a path forward that respects the leadership of the Catholic Church as well as the individuals within the Church who serve our community to make their own, informed moral decisions.

My hope is that no matter what religion, as a faith community, we can ultimately move past these recent events, rededicate ourselves to the missions of our churches, and once again focus on being men and women for others here in the City of Saint Francis.”

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