

## Adopting Non-Discrimination Policies

By New Ways Ministry

In this past year, at least one dozen people were fired from Catholic institutions because of LGBT issues. Some were fired because they legally married a same-gender partner. Others were fired because of their support for such marriages or because of their gender identity. In 2012, five people were fired for these reasons, so we are definitely seeing an increase in such actions by Church leaders. (You can find all the *Bondings 2.0* posts regarding these events by clicking on “Employment Issues” in the “Categories” list on the right side of this page.)

Catholics need to take action to help prevent such firings. Our Catholic social justice tradition compels us to institute structures that promote equality and justice for all people. As Catholics work to make our society more just for LGBT people, we need to also work to make our Church institutions reflect the same kind of justice. We need to make sure that our Church lives up to its best traditions of honoring the dignity of work, respecting a person’s conscience, and treating all people equally.

New Ways Ministry believes that the best way to help LGBT church personnel is for Catholics to work locally to get their Catholic institutions to adopt non-discrimination policies with regard to marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and personal support for marriage equality. Only by adopting such policies will LGBT Church personnel and their supporters be protected from unfair labor practices.

A policy statement can be as simple as: “(Name of parish, school, or institution) will not discriminate in employment practices on the basis of marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and personal support for marriage equality.”

How can you work to implement such policies in your local community? Here are some suggestions to get you started:

1. Identify other people in your parish, school, or other institution who support LGBT equality. Brainstorm with them what might work best locally in your particular situation.
2. Propose such policies to the various decision-makers in an institution. Don’t just approach the person at the top of the hierarchy (e.g., pastor or principal). Work with the “middle managers” who affect the decision makers, such as a parish council, a parent-teacher associations, a social justice committee, a diversity task force, or others who have influence.
3. Collect signatures on a petition to institute a non-discrimination policy to present to the local decision-makers.
4. Gather testimonies about how such firings reflect negatively on the Church’s image. Gather these not only from LGBT people, but from other Catholics who disagree with discriminatory employment practices.
5. Gather testimonies on the spiritual gifts and professional skills of LGBT people from those whose lives are touched by them, such as parents, family members, friends, parishioners, students, colleagues, and alumni.
6. Develop your arguments around the Catholic ideas of justice and equality. The Catholic social justice tradition protects the rights of workers, it respects differences among people, it promotes the equal treatment of all people, it respects everyone’s inherent human dignity.
7. If appropriate, work regionally with other parishes, schools, and Catholic institutions in your area so that more than one place will simultaneously adopt such policies.
8. Contact New Ways Ministry to consult about the particular situation in your community. We’d be glad to be part of your brainstorming and strategizing. Our phone number is 301-277-5674. Our email address is [info@NewWaysMinistry.org](mailto:info@NewWaysMinistry.org)

9. Share your successes and setbacks with us so that we can better help others who want to establish such policies.
10. Share the graphic above with your friends on social media. You can access it through [New Ways Ministry's Facebook page](#) by clicking [here](#).

These are just some tips to help you get started. Every local situation is unique, so do not be afraid to adapt these suggestions to fit your community.

Do not be discouraged by lack of progress or success. Even if your institution ultimately does not adopt such a policy, engaging in this process will help people and the Church to have an open dialogue on the issue. Such discussion will make it more difficult for people to be fired in the future because decision-makers will know of your support for LGBT equality.

In working to establish such a policy, you are in line with Catholic social justice practice. As early as 1973, St. Vincent's Hospital in New York City established an employment non-discrimination policy based on sexual orientation. They were the first Catholic institution to do so. You can read about their story [here](#) and [here](#).

But the tradition of protecting employment of LGBT people and their supporters in Catholic institutions has some more recent precedents, too. For example, this past summer *Bondings 2.0* reported on [two Catholic hospitals](#) lauded by the Human Rights Campaign for their sensitivity to LGBT issues, including employment. And in March, 2013, the laity and church workers of the Diocese of Santa Rosa, California persuaded Bishop Robert Vasa to [retract an orthodoxy pledge](#) in diocesan employment contracts. And in April of 2012, Cardinal Christoph Schonborn of Vienna, Austria, who was a papal candidate, [overturned a pastor's decision to exclude a gay man](#) in a committed relationship from serving on the parish council.

Employment non-discrimination policies offer a great form of legal protection for these Church workers. Please pray about the decision to start this process and start working towards a goal in the best way that you can. Our God of justice will surely reward your efforts.

–Francis DeBernardo, New Ways Ministry

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