

Stand against injustice in Florida diocese

WRITTEN BY ELLEN EUCLIDE

SEPTEMBER 9, 2014

FOCUS AREAS: [CHURCH WORKER JUSTICE](#), [LAY ENGAGEMENT](#), [WOMEN AND GIRLS EQUALITY](#)

FL Catholics want pastoral leadership, Bishop held accountable

Since 2006, Catholics in the diocese of Venice, Florida have been [tirelessly](#) trying to save their Church from the effects of a Bishop who's intimidation and bullying have harmed many. Over 50 letters to the editor have been published locally to publicly expose the injustices of the Bishop which range from outbursts of anger and sexism directed at students to firing school officials who reported sexual predators and mismanaging diocesan funds. Earlier this year, at the risk of losing their own jobs, ten pastors signed their names to a letter [reporting the Bishop's misconduct to his superiors](#).

Now, local Catholics have collected local signatures to the following letter, and are asking Catholics across the country to support their call for justice. [Sign the petition to stand with them!](#)

Dear Francis

August 28, 2014

Pope Francis

Domus Sanctae Marthae

00120 Vatican City State

Your Holiness, Pope Francis:

It is with great sorrow that we report to you that the diocese of Venice in Florida is suffering from the rule of our bishop, a man who operates more like the CEO of a large corporation than the shepherd of his community.

Morale in our diocese has never been so low and the discontent as acute as it is now. Despite a very real fear of retribution from the bishop, ten pastors appealed for justice to Papal Nuncio Carlo Vigano in January 2014. Essentially, their contention is that Bishop Dewane is violating canons 492 and 495 and is guilty of other violations of justice while using intimidation, fear, shaming, and bullying behaviors. While Catholic tradition grants each bishop the power to control his diocese, it does not grant any bishop the right to govern in a manner which violates justice, ignores Canon Law, and mocks the ideal of Christian behavior.

Canon Law 212, paragraph 3, makes clear that the laity have the right and even the duty to speak out to Church authorities against injustice and abuse and on behalf of the common good. While Pope Francis values openness, dialogue, and consultation, our bishop suppresses the open exchange of ideas. We find ourselves in a diocese in which both laity and priests dare not differ with the bishop in any matter, large or small, for fear of retribution.

At least two dozen employees of the diocese have been terminated by Bishop Dewane, not because they are not good workers or good Catholics but simply because Bishop Dewane chooses to exercise an unhealthy need to control others in thought, word, and deed. Intimidation and banishment without a hearing have become commonplace. While one such case would not necessarily be significant, dozens of similar cases reflect a pattern, a pattern which, in the name of justice, calls for an investigation. Once terminated in this diocese, workers usually cannot find work in other parishes, which further compounds the original injustice.

The names and contact information of victims in this diocese can quickly be provided to anyone able to offer protection from further retribution. While the bishop contends he has nothing to do with these terminations, common sense tells any

reasonable person that when termination after termination occurs immediately after the bishop's parish visit or immediately after the bishop's meeting with the individual involved, there's an obvious link between the bishop and these many terminations.

Given this obvious pattern of unfair treatment of laity, priests and organizations in the Diocese of Venice, Florida, we, the undersigned, humbly ask that you delegate someone with the authority to investigate this situation before even more harm is done to our diocese. While Bishop Dewane lives in luxury in his \$1,000,000 mansion renovated at a cost of \$500,000, his priests and the people of God suffer from his treatment and his exorbitant 26% tax on all parishes, many of which are struggling financially.

Attached are two letters about young people and chancery workers who have recently been humiliated by their bishop's actions and words. If you wish, we can send you copies of many letters written to newspapers and ecclesial authorities by parishioners expressing strong dissatisfaction with the behavior of Bishop Dewane. Our plea is for your close attention and follow-up action to the request of faithful Catholics who seek justice and a bishop who serves the people of God rather than a bishop who rules through intimidation and fear.

Contact person:

Ellen McNally

CTA SWFL leader

cc: Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Congregation for Bishops
cc: Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, Apostolic Nuncio

Enclosed, two examples of abuse cases:

[Letter to CTA leaders]

Dear Mr. and Mrs. McNally,

Sadly I have to write clandestinely because I work for the chancery and will lose my job immediately for contacting you. Sorry in this day and age, but I have to feed my kids so I can't take the risk.

I learned that the Vatican is beginning to "get it" regarding these autocratic and abusive bishops. They recently ordered the bishop of Gary, Indiana, to back off and to undergo counseling.

You should now consider a major petition drive requesting the immediate investigation and removal of the bishop. What has gotten the Vatican's attention is hundreds of signatures regarding a particular prelate. The priests of our diocese cannot do this, as much as many wish to. They are deeply threatened and battered. Many have been threatened with removal. The laity need to step up now, especially after all the letters to the press.

You need to take back your churches and your finances and stop this abuse.

Petitions need to be sent directly to the Pope. You need to send as many signatures as possible. Include as well the recent interview article for the News-Press and the Letters to the Editor.

Please help. Many of us are miserable in the chancery too.

[Letter to the Editor in the Fort Myers News-Press (6/30/14)]

Surly Shepherd

I support St. Agnes Catholic Church in Naples. I hope I am not too late to support the 10 priests who used the word "bullying" when describing Bishop Dewane.

Recently, Bishop Dewane confirmed my daughter and a large class at St. Agnes. The tradition is that the newly confirmed and their families have their pictures taken with the bishop outdoors after the ceremony. When the group arrived outdoors, Bishop Dewane was frustrated. He began shouting at the children and their parents. At one point, he was screaming and pushed some into a line. He scared the families when he dismissed the press.

Bishop Dewane had lost control of himself. He negated his own message on "adult responsibilities" that accompany the sacrament of confirmation.

I had enough. I gathered my family and went home with a very disappointed daughter.

Craig Bennett, Naples