



AMERICAN NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

26 June 2017

A Pastoral Letter from Presiding Bishop George R. Lucey, FCM, on Roman Catholic Bishop Thomas Paprocki's Refusal of Christian Burial to Persons in Same-gender Relationships

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

Earlier this month, Thomas Paprocki, Roman Catholic bishop of Springfield, IL, issued a decree, ordering priests in his diocese to refuse communion and Christian burial to persons in same-gender relationships. Moreover, because such persons are deemed to be in "objectively immoral relationships," Bishop Paprocki proclaimed them ineligible to serve in any capacity in liturgical ministry, barred them as sponsors for either Baptism or Confirmation, and forbade them the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA).

This un-Christian directive deeply saddens me. I would like to respond to it from both a personal and pastoral perspective.

First, the personal.

In the second year of my priesthood I was asked to celebrate a Mass of Christian Burial for the partner of a man who had been in a loving and joyous same-gender relationship for over 20 years. His grieving widower shared with me that as a young adult, his partner had been in a Roman Catholic seminary for several years. But his growing awareness of his sexuality as well as his deep sense of integrity led him to leave the seminary and live openly as a gay man.

The widower told me that although his deceased partner loved the Church, he reached the point before his death where he could no longer abide the intolerance of his sexual identity he encountered at his local Roman Catholic parish. So he requested that his partner ask me to conduct the final rites of the Church in the Mass of Christian Burial. The funeral home was packed with friends and family of the deceased, many of whom were Catholic. I was touched and honored to celebrate his life with them.

Now for the pastoral perspective.

In my remarks at the funeral, I reminded everyone that Catholic social teaching reminds us that every person is entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. This dignity is intrinsic, following as it does from our being created in the image of God. For Catholics, the reflection of that dignity is seen in our participation in the sacramental life of the Church.

I know that the loved ones who gathered at that man's funeral were comforted by the words of the liturgy and the peace that the rites of the Church brings to members of a grieving community. I am convinced that to deny these rites on any basis, let alone to be as discriminatory in their administration as Bishop Paprocki's decree, is contrary to the example given us by Christ.



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Christians around the world just celebrated three post-Easter Holy Days that ought to remind us of the fact that God's love is unconditionally given to all. At Pentecost, we gratefully acknowledged that the Spirit of the Lord is a gift bestowed upon all humans; at Holy Trinity, we joyfully recalled that the divine *perichoresis* is a continuous movement of all-embracing love; and at Corpus Christi, we rejoiced in the fact that the Eucharist unites us with one another and with God in bonds of joy and love. The great truths celebrated in these three Holy Days are basics of our faith. What God ordains cannot and should not be set aside by ecclesial decrees.

Consequently, we in the American National Catholic Church (ANCC) reject completely the idea that Holy Mother Church, founded from the blood and water flowing from the side of Christ, would ever deny her children the comfort and succor of Christ's presence in the sacramental life of the Church. Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield's decree is, in essence, the antithesis of our experience of the Church and her teaching about the mercy and love of God, made manifest in Christ and his Church.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "George R. Lucey, FCM".

Most Reverend George R. Lucey, FCM
Presiding Bishop