

Bondings 2.0

New Ways Ministry: Building Bridges Between the LGBT Community and the Catholic Church

German Bishops Extend LGBT Welcome to Church Workers in New Policy



(<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/files/2014/07/woelki.jpg>)

Cardinal Rainer Woelki of Cologne

Germany's bishops voted in favor of new employment policies favorable to church workers in same-gender relationships this week, proving that the firing and forced resignation of LGBT church workers need not be the only response to marriage equality's spread.

More than two-thirds of dioceses voted to approve the ecclesial policy change which allows church workers in same-sex unions, as well as those who have remarried after divorce, to keep their jobs, reports [Reuters](http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/05/06/us-germany-catholic-reform-idUKKBN0NR17720150506) (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/05/06/us-germany-catholic-reform-idUKKBN0NR17720150506>). Cardinal Rainer Woelki of Cologne explained the policy further:

“The point is to limit the consequences of remarriage or a same-sex union to the most serious cases (that would) compromise the Church's integrity and credibility.”

Though German courts have been limiting the scope of religious exemptions, churches are still free to disregard civil law when it comes to employment protections, meaning the bishops also chose this option fairly freely. Germany's bishops explained that “multiple changes in legal practice, legislation

and society” prompted the change. Such honesty about rapid shifts in public support for LGBT rights and the emerging reality of marriage equality, as well as the harm these firings cause, is rare.

Cardinal Woelki, the first in a [new generation of bishops](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/a-new-generation-of-bishops/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/07/27/a-new-generation-of-bishops/>) who show some openness to marriage equality, also noted the unfair enforcement of church sexual ethics in employment cases, something that is very obvious here in the U.S.:

“ ‘People who divorce and remarry are rarely fired,’ he told the KNA news agency. ‘The point is to limit the consequences of remarriage or a same-sex union to the most serious cases (that would) compromise the Church’s integrity and credibility.’ ”

Moreover, the new policy lists other reasons for firing someone, of which two of the examples have nothing to do with sexuality:

“Passages in the new version of Church labor law say that publicly advocating abortion or race hate, or officially quitting the Church, would be a ‘grave breach of loyalty’ that could lead to an employee being fired.”

This policy change comes only weeks after a lesbian kindergarten teacher was [fired for planning to marry her partner](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/04/25/case-of-german-lesbian-fired-from-a-catholic-school-poses-moral-questions/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/04/25/case-of-german-lesbian-fired-from-a-catholic-school-poses-moral-questions/>), one of more than [50 church workers have lost their jobs since 2008](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/employment/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/employment/>) in public incidents. Hopefully, the policy will prevent future conflicts from emerging, but at the very least, Central Committee of German Catholics head Alois Glueck points out:

“ ‘The new rule opens the way for decisions that do justice to the situations people live in.’ ”

What is also important about this policy change is that it proves the church is not forced to fire church workers who commit themselves in same-gender marriages or cause those who support equality before the law to forcibly resign. Germany’s bishops took a “long hard look at the real,” in theologian Jon Sobrino’s words, and recognized the harm this discriminatory practice is causing against the church as well as those ministers, educators, service providers, and volunteers who offered so much of their lives to its mission. Young Catholics have no tolerance and the example set by firing an LGBT church worker [deeply impairs the church’s evangelical outreach](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/04/25/case-of-german-lesbian-fired-from-a-catholic-school-poses-moral-questions/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/04/25/case-of-german-lesbian-fired-from-a-catholic-school-poses-moral-questions/>) in this act of blatant injustice.

This policy is less surprising coming from Germany’s bishops, however, because they have been closely looking at the reality of sexual and family relationships for the last year. In their preparations for last fall’s Synod, they called the church’s teachings “[unrealistic and merciless](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/german-bishops-admit-most-catholics-view-sexual-teachings-unrealistic-and-heartless/)” (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/02/04/german-bishops-admit-most-catholics-view-sexual-teachings-unrealistic-and-heartless/>)” and [one bishop](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/german-bishop-calls-for-sexual-ethics-overhaul-while-u-s-prelates-cling-to-past/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/german-bishop-calls-for-sexual-ethics-overhaul-while-u-s-prelates-cling-to-past/>), alongside the nation’s [leading theologians](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/german-theologians-propose-new-paradigm-for-sexual-ethics/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2014/01/27/german-theologians-propose-new-paradigm-for-sexual-ethics/>), called for a complete overhaul of Catholic sexual ethics. Cardinal Woelki specifically has [endorsed the recognition of same-gender partnerships](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/church-leaders-supporting-same-gender-couples/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/church-leaders-supporting-same-gender-couples/>) and made repeated [favorable comments](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/10/berlin-favorable-comments/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2012/07/10/berlin-favorable-comments/>)

[cardinal-re-affirms-his-support-for-lesbian-and-gay-relationships/](#)) on LGBT issues, as have his peers like [Cardinal Reinhard Marx](https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/02/08/what-to-make-of-cardinal-marxs-ambivalence-toward-gay-lesbian-couples/) (<https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/02/08/what-to-make-of-cardinal-marxs-ambivalence-toward-gay-lesbian-couples/>) of Munich.

Their efforts sometimes fall short of the calls for full equality and justice by LGBT advocates, but compared to other episcopal voices, they are moving the church forward — enough so that even the head of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith under Pope Francis felt it necessary to [chastise them last month](http://ncronline.org/news/global/cardinal-says-bishops-conferences-cannot-go-it-alone-doctrine) (<http://ncronline.org/news/global/cardinal-says-bishops-conferences-cannot-go-it-alone-doctrine>) by issuing a statement that national bishops' conferences had no authority to create doctrine.

This latest policy reform by the German bishops is a concrete expression of their growing respect and concern for LGBT people, as well as of a desire that the church live out the justice that it proclaims. It should be a model for American bishops to take up in their own handling of church workers.

–Bob Shine, New Ways Ministry

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9 Responses to *German Bishops Extend LGBT Welcome to Church Workers in New Policy*

[terryweldon](#) says:

[May 7, 2015 at 5:54 am](#)

Reblogged this on [Queering the Church](#).

Reply**terryweldon says:**May 7, 2015 at 5:55 am

This is superb news!

Now for the US bishops to take note?

Reply**Bishop Carlos Florido, osf says:**May 7, 2015 at 9:53 am

Thank God for illuminated German Bishops

Reply**Brian Kneeland says:**May 7, 2015 at 9:58 am

I agree with terryweldon! Get these bishops to come and speak to the USCCB in November and hopefully move their hearts!

Reply**juniorstopdiscriminationtodaymayema says:**May 7, 2015 at 4:24 pmReblogged this on juniorstopdiscriminationtodaymayema and commented:

Great news and what about the USA and worldwide???

Reply**Friends says:**May 7, 2015 at 9:41 pm

As much as we will regret losing Pope Francis, probably within the next decade, let's hope that the Holy Spirit moves once again to surprise the Church, and seats one of these socially conscious and progressive German bishops as the next Pope. This choice would clearly make up for the horrible damage done by the earlier German Pope. No further explanation is necessary.

Reply**Obispos alemanes acaban de votar dando la bienvenida en la Iglesia a los Trabajadores en Nueva Política | Evangelizadoras de los apóstoles says:**May 9, 2015 at 1:53 pm[...] <https://newwaysministryblog.wordpress.com/2015/05/06/german-bishops-extend-lgbt-welcome-to-church-wo…> [...]**Reply****LGBT Church Worker Struggles Continue in Court, in Schools, and the Chancery | Bondings 2.0 says:**May 15, 2015 at 1:01 am

[...] come as more positive news broke in Germany last week, with bishops in that nation announcing a labor policy protecting LGBT employees who enter same-gender partnerships from immediate firing or retribution. Yet, in the United States, [...]

Reply**European Bishops Strategize for Positive LGBT Outcome at October's Synod | Bondings 2.0 says:**May 27, 2015 at 1:00 am

[...] sexuality and admitted church teaching develops over time. German bishops recently announced a new policy of not firing LGBT church workers who come out or marry a same-gender [...]

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