

Your Holiness Pope Francis  
Apostolic Palace  
Vatican City: 00120

Your Holiness,

We write to you today with humility to request a Papal audience. With loving eloquence you have explained that the role of the Church is to restore what is broken and unite what has been divided. In this spirit of wholeness and reconciliation, we hope you will agree to meet with us and our families to hear our stories.

We have devoted years, some of us even decades, to serving our communities as teachers, leaders and role models. We have made a conscious choice to work within the Catholic Church because we strongly believe that a Catholic education prepares our young people to be responsible citizens, men and women for others. For each and every one of us, our employment was far more than just a job – it was a reflection of core Catholic values.

Unfortunately, we are a group bonded together not just by Catholic values. We are a group of teachers, administrators and lay people who have all lost our jobs simply because of who we love. We are good teachers and role models. The economic hardships and emotional impact we have experienced from losing our jobs, not for inability or lack of dedication, but for who we love, is devastating.

After each termination, school and Church officials have told us we violate Catholic Church teachings on homosexuality. Yet, such directives have not only caused great harm to our families, but also contradict your pastoral priority for the Church to reflect the beauty of God in ways that attract and entice rather than alienate.

Your Holiness has said that "[u]nless we train ministers capable of warming people's hearts, of walking with them in the night, of dialoguing with their hopes and disappointment, of mending their brokenness, what hope can we have for our present and future journey." We agree and we respectfully submit that it is time for our Church to reflect on how it treats lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) Catholics, and the family members who embrace them. Love thy neighbor as thyself is at the foundation of the gospel and the Church's social teaching, and yet we are not treated as neighbors.

All of us are called to lovingly serve one another. The founder of the Society of Jesus, Saint Ignatius of Loyola teaches us "love is shown more in deeds than in words." Yet how are we to fulfill the words of St. Ignatius if we are barred from showing our love through our deeds? We are eager and willing to do the work of educating our youth, yet we have been denied the opportunity to do so by the very Church that has instilled in us an understanding of the sacred dignity of work. Rather than evaluating our abilities based on our job performance, the Church has instead turned a blind eye to its own founding values and denied those who would lovingly serve an opportunity to do so.

Too many LGBT Catholics and their loved ones feel abandoned by the Catholic Church, unwelcome and judged by Church regulations that simply do not align with the Catholic values that we strive to


live our lives by. This must end. While Catholics are among the most welcoming and embracing of all people of faith, the hierarchy is doing an incredible amount of damage by emotionlessly wielding discriminatory policies against faithful Catholics.

All of us were fired for whom we love – whether it be for committing ourselves to one person, and one person only, for the rest of our lives, or for embracing and supporting our own children unconditionally. Love is one of the greatest gifts God bestows upon us, and we can think of nothing more sacred than loving another human being through challenges, sicknesses and times of distress. The Church celebrates this type of sacred commitment. But for some reason, it rejects that same commitment when it's between loving LGBT people. For some reason, it rejects that love when a mother embraces her LGBT child.

Our families are hurting. We feel scorned by our church, which we have dedicated our lives to. From coaching sports teams, to leading canned food drives, to going to Church every single Sunday – we feel abandoned by the Catholic Church. We know God has not abandoned us. Our friends, loved ones, and many others in our community have not abandoned us. But we feel the hierarchy of our Church is denying us the pastoral care and love they are called to do.

We take hope from your messages of acceptance and see in your pastoral leadership the possibility for the Church to correct these hurtful injustices. We ask for a Papal audience with our families, so that you may hear our personal stories firsthand and see the impact the Church's actions have had on us all.

Respectfully,



Tippi McCullough  
Mount St. Mary's  
Little Rock, AR



Nicholas Coppola  
St. Anthony's Catholic Church  
Oceanside, NY



Flint Dollar  
Mount de Sales Academy  
Macon, GA



Michael Griffin  
Holy Ghost Preparatory School  
Bensalem, PA

Richard Hague  
Purcell Marian High School  
Cincinnati, OH



Richard Miller  
St Rita School for the Deaf  
Cincinnati, Ohio



Kristen Ostendorf  
Totino-Grace Catholic High School  
Fridley, MN



Brian Panetta  
Sandusky Catholic High School  
Cleveland, OH



Molly Shumate  
Cincinnati Archdiocese  
Cincinnati, OH