



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 14, 2009

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Bishop Will Not Reinstate Fired Church Worker; Madison Catholics Begin Withholding Campaign, Consider Lawsuit

(Madison, WI) Bishop Morlino has announced his decision not to reinstate Ruth Kolpack, the church employee he fired in March over her masters' thesis on inclusive language. In response, Ms. Kolpack's supporters are asking fellow Catholics to respond to Bishop Morlino's Annual Catholic Appeal fundraiser by sending in their appeal envelopes without money and with the words "Reinstate Ruth." Ms. Kolpack has also been in consultation with a canon lawyer.

"I am exploring my legal options," said Ms. Kolpack, "because I am just one of 30,000 other lay ministers in the United States who can be fired at a bishop or priest's whim without any recourse. I have to take a stand not only for myself but for my fellow lay ministers who do not have any workplace protections."

"There is a long history of Catholic social justice teaching that supports workers' justice," said Ms. Kolpack, "but when it comes to living out these rights in the church, we are denied them: the right to unionize, the right to see one's personnel file, the right to address a wrongful termination. I pray taking action on this issue will bring us one step closer to worker's justice in the Church."

Jim Andrews, a parishioner at Ms. Kolpack's church and organizer of her campaign, said "We are asking Catholics in the Madison Diocese to withhold their funds from the annual appeal until the Diocese reinstates Ruth and creates a worker justice policy in line with Catholic social justice teaching. We do this for Ruth today. We do this for the liturgist who was fired last year. We do this for the lay minister who could be fired tomorrow."

"This diocese has suffered a series of unjust firings by Bishop Morlino," said Mr. Andrews. "It is an embarrassment to our faith and contradicts the long tradition of workers' justice for which our church stands."

The U.S. Bishops document, "Economic Justice for All," states: People have a right to employment. Workers have a right to wages and other benefits sufficient to sustain life in dignity. The dignity of workers also requires adequate health care, security for old age or disability, unemployment compensation, healthful working conditions, weekly rest, periodic holidays for recreation and leisure, and reasonable security against arbitrary dismissal" (Economic Justice for All, #103).

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