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Homosexual Ex-Altar Server Demands Bishop Apologize, Publicly Chastise Parishioners in Human Rights Complaint

By Patrick B. Craine

July 13, 2009 (LifeSiteNews.com) - In what some critics of the embattled Canadian human rights commissions say could be the most intrusive human rights case in Canada thus far, the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal (OHRT) has accepted the complaint of a homosexual man who was dismissed by the Bishop of Peterborough as an altar server. While the bishop has refused to publicly comment on the matter, the complainant in the case says that the bishop asked him and his same-sex partner not to serve on the altar so as to avoid public scandal.



Jim Corcoran

Jim Corcoran, the owner of one of Canada's most highly-rated spas, filed his complaint to the OHRT on June 17th against Bishop Nicola de Angelis and twelve of Corcoran's fellow parishioners at St. Michael's Parish in Cobourg, Ontario, who had jointly written a letter to Bishop De Angelis about the situation. (To read the complaint click [here](#))

Human rights complaints have been brought against members of the Church in the past via Canada's HRCs, but this case is the first to be accepted by a Tribunal that relates to the internal governance of the Church, with the potential for unprecedented repercussions relating to the Church's freedom in Canada.

Corcoran, who was removed on April 20th, told LifeSiteNews.com (LSN) that he is homosexual, and that he is living with another man, but evaded questions about his roommate's sexual orientation. According to Michael Swan of the Catholic Register, however, Corcoran told him that he is living with another gay man. Without denying Swan's statement, Corcoran told LSN, "I didn't say that, Michael said that. I live in a house with my mother ..., and I live with another man, who I don't have a sexual relationship with."

"I live a chaste lifestyle," said Corcoran, "so I'm not sure why the label is relevant at all."

Corcoran said the 12 parishioners who complained to the bishop had misinterpreted passages from his blog as meaning that he was in an open homosexual relationship. "They went on my blog," he said, "and in my blog I talk about my life, my work life, my family life, my thoughts, my aspirations, and apparently they printed out about 70 pages."

In Corcoran's complaint to the OHRT, however, which he supplied to LSN, he appears to be more frank about his relationship with his roommate. Corcoran specifically and repeatedly refers to his roommate as "my same sex partner." Further, responding to an allegation that he is "married" to his partner, Corcoran wrote, "I am not married to my same sex partner but I do not hide my sexual preference, or my relationship."

Corcoran told LSN that he ascribes to the Catholic teaching on marriage. "I believe that marriage is a sacrament between a man and a woman," he said. "I'm not one to trample on the rights of others, but ... same-sex marriage, isn't something that I ascribe to, or have engaged in."

Gerry Lawless, one of the twelve parishioners named by Corcoran as respondents to his complaint, told LSN that the group of 12 did not mention marriage, and contests Corcoran's claim that they slandered him. "He charges us with slander," Lawless said, "but we feel that in order to slander a person, you have to mention their name. His name or his partner's has never been named in any correspondence, not by the twelve that he's after."

"There's no evidence at all to suggest that we were trying to be discriminatory or that we have some sort of distaste for people of same-sex orientation, or any of this," Lawless told Swan of the Catholic Register.

Lawless told LSN that they had been instructed to welcome homosexuals attending Mass and receiving Communion, but that open homosexuals should not be participating in the liturgy in a public position, as, say, a lector or an altar server. "We have not discriminated. We have simply asked the bishop to act on a situation which we had been informed on very good authority was in violation of church policy," he told the Catholic Register.

According to the Catholic Register, the two sides have agreed to mediation, which, if successful will keep the case from reaching a hearing. "At the moment we don't need a lawyer," Lawless said, pointing out that he was happy not to have to pay expensive legal fees for the time being.

Corcoran is seeking monetary damages of up to \$25,000 from the bishop and \$20,000 each from the 12 parishioners. But his primary interest is in restitution of a non-financial nature, he says. He states in his complaint that he wants the \$20,000 from each of the parishioners to be allocated "towards a charity of my choosing." And the \$25,000 from the diocese will be used to cover his legal expenses; but, he told LSN, he will be returning it through parish contributions.

He has also requested six other "remedies." First, he indicates that he "would like the group of 12 parishioners to be held accountable for their un-Christian actions, in front of their peers in a public forum, by the Bishop or the Bishop's superior." Second, he wants the Bishop to preach at his parish "on the consequences of practicing discrimination and the slanderous spreading of rumours, hate and innuendo."

Third, he wants to be restored as an altar server, and fourth, for the bishop to apologize for having removed him. Fifth, he wants the bishop to write an article for the diocesan newspaper "on the rights of persons with same sex attractions to practice their faith within the Catholic Church without fear of threats, recrimination or discrimination." And finally, sixth, he wants the diocese to develop policies "that support the human rights of all people within the church."

When asked whether he feels his complaint to the OHRC has placed him at odds with the Church, Corcoran told LSN, "I would hope that the bishop would not see it that way. ... I'm still going to church, I'm still a very generous supporter of the Catholic Church, and he knows that, and I'm following his directive."

"He's asked me not to serve on the altar and I'm not," Corcoran said. "He's asked me to stay close to and support Fr. Hood, and I am. So I would hope that when he sits down with his legal counsel, he'll understand that this is really a struggle between me and the group of fellow parishioners, and Fr. Hood and the group of fellow parishioners."

Referring to the bishop's refusal to supply Corcoran with the twelve parishioners' letter, a key piece of evidence against them, Corcoran said, "Unfortunately, he passed on the opportunity to avoid being named as a respondent by not agreeing to cooperate at the outset."

According to Reg Ward, another of the 12, who spoke with Swan, the group's main concern in writing to Bishop De Angelis was to express concern about their pastor, Fr.

Allan Hood. According to Ward, and confirmed by Corcoran in speaking with LSN, Corcoran and his partner were invited by Fr. Hood to serve on the altar at Masses. The complaint about Corcoran was one in a series of complaints to the bishop against the pastor.

"It was just one more way of Fr. Hood saying he's boss and to hell with everybody else, like what the church is saying and everybody else," said Ward.

Fr. Hood did not return calls from LSN by press time. LSN also left a message with the OHRC, but did not hear back.

LSN spoke with Bishop De Angelis, but he is not yet prepared to comment.

In a press release on Friday, the Catholic Civil Rights League came out strongly against the OHRC for accepting this case, saying the case is "not an OHRC matter."

"Without commenting on any individual personnel situation or personalities that are involved in this case," the release says, "the relationship between the Church and altar servers, in the League's opinion, has none of the attributes that would make it a subject for a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal. No one serves on the altar as a right; it is at the discretion of the pastor, who in turn is at the service of his bishop. Mr. Corcoran's role was not unlike that of other liturgical servers, who are part of the overall presentation of the Mass."

"The decision about who can serve on the altar is a matter of Church governance," it continues. "While the Church is subject to human rights law when it employs people in a commercial relationship, the same cannot be said about decisions involving who is a member, or how they can best serve."

The Human Rights Tribunal, said the League, "should not place itself as an arbiter of canonical precepts."

See the Catholic Register report [here](#)

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