

Dowling Catholic High School addresses protest

By Bishop Richard Pates

Dowling Catholic High School recently encountered protest to its decision not to hire Tyler McCubbin because of incompatibility with the teachings and doctrine of the Catholic Church.

After serving periodically as a substitute teacher and track coach, the individual applied for a full-time position. In the course of due diligence, a search of social media revealed the fact that he was engaged to marry another man.

At that point, the employment relationship with Dowling Catholic was discontinued.

Two particular teachings of the Catholic Church were operative.

1) According to the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, all persons with same-sex attraction are to be treated with “respect, compassion and sensitivity.” This is the guiding principle in all such situations at our Catholic schools, and that is how we treated Mr. McCubbin.

2) In line with natural law, the sacred Scriptures and a 2,000-year tradition, the Catholic Church holds that the sacrament of marriage is between one man and one woman. That is the basis of the school’s prohibition against hiring anyone whose words or actions are at odds with Catholic teaching and Dowling Catholic’s employee guidelines.

On April 8, it was reported by those monitoring the event that approximately 70 students, out of an enrollment of 1,400 students, peacefully protested the decision and presented concerns to the Dowling Catholic administration.

In addressing the situation, Dowling Catholic attempts to treat all its publics with “respect, sensitivity and compassion.” In terms of its Catholic identity, it is guided by longstanding policy and practice of the Catholic Church which are followed by all diocesan Catholic schools.

Characteristic of his leadership, Dr. Jerry Deegan, along with the Dowling Catholic staff and faculty, exercised balance and prudence in a difficult situation while remaining consistent in principle. I commend them for their approach.

As has been the practice at Dowling Catholic, the students will have the availability of two top-notch priest chaplains as well as a very capable counseling staff. Personal issues will continue to be addressed in a manner that reflects highest counseling standards.

Dowling Catholic students have been and continue to be guided by “compassion, respect and sensitivity” in their relationship with one another.

In a secular society, there will inevitably be conflict between those who exercise religious liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment in the expression of moral beliefs and others who hold different viewpoints and practices which enjoy government recognized civil rights. In the working and living out of these realities and differences, Pope Francis reminds us that love must prevail since we are all daughters and sons of God made in his image and likeness.

“A Nuclear Free World”

In his URBI et ORBI (City and World) Easter Message, Pope Francis extended a hope and a prayer that the framework for arriving at a substantive agreement between the P5+1 and Iran regarding Iran’s developing nuclear weapons be successful.

Given the deeply frozen relationship between the United States and Iran of only a few years ago, it is remarkable that talks were initiated and dialogue ensued that offer the world optimism that the proliferation of nuclear armaments be stymied and the reverse process of disarmament be engaged.

Pope Francis joins the chorus of modern Popes beginning with St. John XXIII and his encyclical “Pacem In Terris” which called for the elimination of nuclear weapons. This teaching was repeated in the Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*. The Bishops of the United States issued similar clarion calls with their documents for peace published in 1983 and 1993.

The Church documents, from a moral perspective, accepted only on a transitional basis, the possession of nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence especially during the cold war. Since the explosion of one nuclear device could create unfathomable and widespread destruction to non-combatants and innocent people, their use can never be accommodated by the just war teaching of the Church. For this reason, the only justifiable goal is disarmament. This is the unwavering teaching of the Church.

Today, Russia and the United States control 90% of nuclear warheads. But possession of these weapons has spread to other countries. Currently, eight countries have nuclear weapons. It is estimated that if India and Pakistan, both possessing such arms, engaged in utilizing them 2 billion people would be killed and it would require centuries for the earth to recover from the ensuing disaster. Thus, proliferation of weapons creates a world less secure and less safe for everyone. The only path to reasonably assured security is disarmament or nuclear zero.

The Vatican Academy for Science sponsored a conference in November called *Less Nuclear Stocks and More Development*. I was honored to represent the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at this meeting. The theme of the gathering which drew representatives from the United States, Russia, France, the United Nations and the Vatican is that enormous resources are invested for the maintenance, development (believe it or not) and storage of weapons whose only purpose (deterrence) is that they will never be used.

The budget of the United States provides 35 billion dollars a year in service to its nuclear arsenal. If these resources were instead deployed for development perhaps in Africa – for education, health, and economic development consider the remarkable, indeed unbelievable good that would be accomplished. Would it not be a reprise of the Marshall Plan after World War II that set the stage for a peace that has endured until now?

Pope Francis in a message to the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons, December 7, 2014, highlighted this argument poignantly:

“Spending on nuclear weapons squanders the wealth of nations. To prioritize such spending is a mistake and a misallocation of resources which would be far better invested in the areas of integral human development, education, health and the fight against extreme poverty. When these resources are squandered, the poor and the weak living on the margins of society pay the price. . . .

Peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples.”

If disarmament were to be achieved, global security would be more in hand. Qualified experts maintain that technical methodology of assuring verifiable compliance with nuclear agreements has advanced to the point where it is reliable.

In the interest of humanity, of an authentic peace, not just a “peace of a sort” our action and support of disarmament are urgently called for. Our future, the future of our children, grandchildren, all those our imagination conjures of future progeny up demand it.

In March of 2014 I joined a delegation from the USCCB in a visit to Qom, Iran, to engage in dialogue with religious leaders of Shia Islam. To say the least, it was an enlightening experience which is nearly always the case when we enter into discussion with another party in which there is seemingly great distance in belief and outlook.

After five days of intense dialogue our surprise was the common ground we share. Our point of convergence was moral principle on the utilization of nuclear, chemical or biological weapons.

The Iranians exemplified their teaching that the use of such instruments of war is immoral by referring to a FATWA of their supreme leader, Grand Ayatollah Khamenei. A FATWA is a teaching instrument of a prominent religious leader in the Shia tradition which carries the equivalent weight of religious principle. The FATWA in question is similar to this:

All people carry the identity of God, the Creator, through the fact of his creating hand. Given this principle, two parties were at war. One lived upstream from the other. Is it moral for the upstream party to poison the river and wipe out the rivals downstream?

The response, no it is not moral since many non-combatants, many innocent civilians, who deserve respect and protection because of their relationship with the divine through creation. They are the work of his hands.

The Iranians contend that this position was maintained in the Iraq (which was supported by the United States) war with Iran in the 1990’s. Iraq used chemical weapons. Iran did not respond in kind because of its standing belief that such would be immoral.

Returning to the framework guiding the conversations between Iran and the P5+1, regarding the development of nuclear weapons by Iran, perhaps the perspective emanating from such dialogue opens us to the perspective that there is good reason to hope for a binding, successful outcome. The constant refrain of Pope Francis – “dialogue, dialogue, dialogue” will hopefully bear fruit as we strive for authentic peace.

Given the stakes in play, it is worth our intense prayer as Pope Francis insists. It merits our best efforts.