

Administrators show lack of integrity

We are writing to stand in support of and express our sympathy to Ann Schrooten and her family and to Ellen Kennedy and Leigh Lawton. We are deeply disappointed at the unfair way the University of St. Thomas administration has treated our colleagues. Ann Schrooten came to St. Thomas under the impression that it does not discriminate based on sexual orientation. This was a reasonable assumption given the school's publicly posted non-discrimination policy.

However, when Ann planned to travel abroad with the St. Thomas Liturgical Choir accompanied by her partner and son, university officials forbid her family's attendance, citing the "moral dilemma" such arrangements would cause students.

We do not believe that a couple in a committed, loving relationship traveling with students presents a moral dilemma for those students. Rather, it was long-time couple Ellen Kennedy and Leigh Lawton who faced a moral dilemma when university administration required them either to deny their relationship or to withdraw from leading their study abroad course. To ask anyone, faculty or staff, to deny the existence of their family creates a deceitful role model for our students.

We object to such administrative requests as intolerable and inconsistent with the open, accepting environment the university espouses.

We cannot agree with the administration's position that it did not discriminate against Ann Schrooten based on her sexual orientation, claiming an unwritten policy bars faculty and staff from traveling with unmarried partners.

We recognize that faculty members have traveled with unmarried partners on student trips for years and that the university was silent on the issue.

We object to the fact that it was not until a lesbian in a committed relationship had plans for bringing her family on a trip that faculty living arrangements became an issue.

We see it as disingenuous for the administration to use the "unmarried partner" rationale for a same sex couple, when it is barred from marriage under current Minnesota law.

Furthermore, while the administration has stated that it recognizes legal marriages, even if they are non-sacramental, it has been silent on whether Ann and her partner could travel together if they were legally married outside of Minnesota.

We condemn any policy, written or unwritten, that would allow administration to recognize selectively those marriages legally conducted in other states or in other countries.

We call for the administration to honor its publicly proclaimed commitment to diversity and to promise not to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation or marital status.

The administration has declared its unwritten policy concerning this matter shields persons in non-sacramental marriages from reproach. Yet it uses this policy to condemn non-married heterosexuals and homosexuals as bad role models, regardless of how committed they are to each other. We, your colleagues, have asked the question, "Why this double standard?"

We see the love, commitment and monogamy between Ann and her partner and between Ellen and Leigh as no less real because they are not married. We admire both couples for refusing to agree to join the administration in a deceitful act of pretending that they are not a couple. Their commitment to their partner is to be supported, not condemned. Ann and her partner and Ellen and Leigh are excellent role models for our students.

We hope that students model their integrity, not the lack of integrity shown by an administration that states that it embraces diversity, but chooses to discriminate against members of its own community; that says certain behavior is unacceptable if known by students when off campus, but deems it acceptable if known by students when on campus; and that says academic integrity is important, but sanctions revising a course without ARCIE and academic department approval.

It is the administration's hypocritical behavior that has served as a bad role model for our students, not the behavior exhibited by our colleagues.

We align ourselves with these three colleagues who have been discriminated against by our administration because none of us can find sure footing on the slippery slope upon which the administration has placed its faculty and staff.

We do not accept the administration's retroactive application of an unwritten policy that is contradictory, discriminatory and applied without due consideration for those affected by it.

Yours in solidarity,

The undersigned

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