



WEEKLY MEMO from BMW

Date: September 29, 2014
From: Bishop Michael W. Warfel
To: Clergy, Religious, Lay Ecclesial Ministers

As this memo is being sent out, I'll likely be on a plane flying toward Europe along with a group of parishioners and one priest from Eastern Montana. Given some of the tensions that seem regularly to surface in the Diocese, it'll be nice to have a break with a good section of the faithful. We are scheduled to return just in time for the Holy Spirit School Gala on Saturday, October 11th and the 100th anniversary of St. Mathias in Ryegate. Before I departed, I thought it would be important to make some comments with regard to the polarizing situation that has occurred in Lewistown and other areas of the Diocese.

It's highly unlikely that people reading this would be unaware of the controversy that has resulted surrounding the civil marriage to two Catholic men who are parishioners at St. Leo's Parish in Lewistown. It is always my preference to address sensitive matters in a manner in which they do not become public. It unfortunately has become quite public. There was even an Editorial Opinion piece that referred to this in the New York Times. Given the very public dimension of the controversy, much as a result of the media's reporting of it, a solution that would be in accord with Church teaching and acceptable to all is unlikely. The public nature of the issue has drawn the notion of theological scandal to the fore front.

Some people think of scandal as behavior that simply is shocking in its nature. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil" and it "...takes on a particular gravity by reason of the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who are scandalized" (CCC #2284/85). Jesus used rather harsh language toward those who, through their actions, lead others into sin. He said it would be better that they have a millstone tied around their necks and drowned in the sea (cf. Matt 18:6). That two very well-known and respected members of the parish as well as the community entered into a civil marriage and that it has become so public is a matter of scandal. For a bishop simply to ignore this matter, now that it has become so public, would be in essence to agree with the action and cause an even greater level of scandal. In my role as teacher, it would be implying to many people that the teaching of the Church on marriage is seriously in error. At the same time, it would imply that there is nothing wrong at all with same-sex partners marrying. It would indicate that same-sex marriages are on par with the millennial held understanding by Church and society of marriage belonging solely between a man and a woman. As a Catholic bishop, I simply find it strange that many in our society now view something that objectively is sinful and so counter to what is taught in Scripture and our Apostolic tradition as being holy!! Ignored by many is that fact that marriage as defined by the Church is settled doctrine. As settled doctrine, there may be

development in our understanding, but it is not up for change in its fundamental definition.

Some would say, it is not fair or it is unjust to deny same-sex partners the civil “right” to marry. In reality, it is not unjust at all because marriage and same-sex unions are essentially different realities. Justice actually requires society to maintain its long standing definition of marriage. To uphold God's intent for marriage, in which sexual relations have their proper and exclusive place, is not to offend the dignity of homosexual persons.

A central issue with many same-sex partners is the social benefits that are received through marriage. The legal recognition of marriage, including the benefits associated with it, is not really about the personal commitment of two individuals, but about the social commitment that husband and father and a wife and a mother make to the well-being of society. For those who are in same-sex unions, some benefits can be obtained without regard to marital status such as owning property jointly with another and designating anyone they choose to be a beneficiary of their will or indicating who they want to make health care decisions in case they become incompetent or sick.

The issue of withholding Communion from two individuals is likely the most neuralgic factor in the controversy. In trying to think of an analogous example that could cause a pastor to deny Communion, one might think of an involved Catholic parishioner who was then ordained as a Protestant minister. They would likely be acting according to their sense of conscience and they would probably be a very good person, but they would have broken their communion with the Catholic Church in a very fundamental way. In a similar way, when someone enters into a public commitment that is deeply in conflict with a fundamental Catholic teaching, it impacts their communion with the Church.

On October 12th, Father Doug Krings and I will call the congregation of St. Mathias in Ryegate to celebrate its 100th Anniversary and honor Servant of God Dorothy Day, who visited Ryegate in 1955, and who died in 1980.

Dorothy Day was the Founder of the Catholic Worker Movement and the Catholic Worker newspaper in 1933; she is a noted pacifist and a legendary friend and protector of the urban poor. Her cause for canonization in the Catholic Church has been introduced. During the festive ceremony, I will bless a picture of Dorothy Day and a plaque which recalls her visit to the parish. All that is known about her visit is simply that the pastor, Father James Kattleson, was interested in social issues and corresponded with Dorothy. Kattleson died in a car accident in 1959. The only one in the area who remembers Day's visit is Roy Stiles, whose ranch is east of Broadview. Dorothy visited his family during her stay in Ryegate.

Retired diocesan priest Father Robert J. Paul Fox has written a book to mark the visit of Dorothy day. It is entitled “Dorothy Day's Visit to Montana,” and will be available during the October 12 event for \$10.00. It is a summary of Dorothy's life, and it includes reprints of her articles on the visit to Ryegate and to a Hutterite Colony near

Grassrange. Fox says the book is from secondary sources and skims the surface. Readers would be better informed, Fox says, by reading William Miller's biography of Dorothy Day or his history of the Catholic Worker entitled "A Harsh and Dreadful Love." To read Day's two autobiographies would be best: "The Long Loneliness," and "Loaves and Fishes." Ryegate parishioners invite guests to visit Dorothy's Shrine and pray there.

By now I'm sure most parishes have begun their Religious Education classes for the year. I would like to give all RE teachers and school Principals a heads up that the Safe Environment materials for the 2014-2015 year will be going out later this week. To recap all parish classes and all school children, pre-K through 12, are required to offer Safe Environment training in accordance with the USCCB Charter and Norms. This information is being sent to Pastors, Parish Life Coordinators, Parish Administrators, DRE's, and Religious Education teachers on file here at the Chancery. It is also available on our website under "Protecting Our Children." Please be sure the information is sent to the proper individuals in your parish or school. The deadline for this year's program is **January 30, 2015** and I would like to see 100% participation. Last year's participation was only 78% and I feel we can all do a much better job. If you have any questions regarding the children's program, please contact Anne Beckley or Laurie Horton at the Chancery.