

The St. Stephen community is experiencing a crisis of leadership involving selective discrimination against gay parishoners. Last winter, Fr. Scott Nolan denied the Eucharist to two gay parishoners in front of their child and community without any advance notice. They were later told that they are not welcome to the sacrament due to their lifestyle. This act ignited a strong response from the church and school community which is rooted in a tradition of love and inclusion.

Strict interpretation of canon law would suggest that individuals may be denied communion due to "grave sin" such as acts homosexuality, but the Catholic Catechism identifies a wide list of grave sins, including divorce, use of contraceptives, alcohol abuse, use of drugs, theft, lying, gluttony and many others. Fr. Scott's denial of the Eucharist was very clearly an act of selective discrimination based on his personal qualms with homosexuality. It is not in accordance with the teaching of Pope Francis that advises against the denial of communion and states that "the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

On November 17 Judge Sara Smolenski, a gay parisher, returned to mass at St. Stephen after having left last spring for fear that she, too, would be denied the Eucharist. Sara was given the Eucharist at the Mass, but Fr. Scott later called her to demand that she "respect the church" and not return for the sacrament in the future. Sara has been a member of St. Stephen for over 60 years. Her parents were married and buried there, she and her 9 siblings attended school there, she volunteered 25 years as a Eucharistic Minister and in many other roles, and has been a substantial donor to support the church. This act by Fr. Scott is a clear indication that he will continue to practice selective discrimination against members of our community.

These acts have been destructive to the culture of inclusion and diversity that are hallmarks of St Stephen. There has been a massive decline in school enrollment, and an exodus of teachers and staff. Many individuals have withdrawn financial support from the parish and Diocese, and transferred those funds to support to the St. Stephen school or other causes.

Please share this message throughout the Grand Rapids and Catholic communities. Please also consider mailing a letter to Bishop Walkowiak and Archbishop Vigneron to share your conscience and demand that selective discrimination not be allowed at St. Stephen parish.

Writing to the Bishop: Bishop David Walkowiak, 360 Division Ave S, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

Writing to the Archbishop: Archbishop Allen Vigneron, 12 State St, Detroit, MI 48226