

A Letter to the Community of Westwood,

For the past 20 years, I have had the honor of teaching many of your children religious education at the St. Joan of Arc Parish in Westwood. It has been my vocation. Sharing God's love, and my love, with your kids brought me incomparable joy. I also led the special needs faith formation program, adult prayer program, bible studies, women's retreats, co-chaired the social justice society, and coordinated funerals with compassion.

On Sept. 16th, without warning, my life turned upside down. The new pastor, Father Norwood called me into his office and told me my that my job was eliminated, with no explanation, no two weeks' notice, nothing. I had to turn over my keys and laptop and was escorted by a staff member to clear out my belongings. I was dumbfounded and heartbroken. I still do not know what I did to warrant this kind of treatment, after dedicating most of my life to the Archdiocese and the Westwood Catholic Community. Father Norwood never gave me an opportunity to prove myself. All he said was that he was restructuring the religious ed program.

What saddens me the most is that Father Norwood continues to tell confused parishioners that he is unable to speak on personnel matters. This is quite hurtful, as it implies that I have done something wrong. You must know I have not done anything wrong and have always put the Lord first. Flowing from that, I have been able to dedicate myself completely and totally to the people the Lord has put in my path; from children, to teens, to adults, Catholic or not, practicing or not.

To clear my name, I provide this evidence; I was offered unemployment (referred to as TAP by the Archdiocese). This cannot be given if a person is fired for cause. If Father Norwood was unhappy with my work, why didn't he put me on a standard performance improvement plan? Instead, he just fired me on the spot.

Thankfully, I have received multiple glowing recommendations after my abrupt termination, from friends and mentors, including priests and a former pastor here in Westwood. These will hopefully allow me to find work, but it also proves how valued I was by the Church.

I have to publish this letter, so you can hear directly from me what happened. I do this to clear my name.

Hundreds of you have reached out to me offering words of support and strength. I do not know what I would do without all of you. Close to 200 residents signed a petition expressing support for me. I read every comment, and am so moved by all the young people talking about how I helped shape their love of God. I have faith that I will someday land on my feet.

Please know that I have a tremendous love for the Lord and His Church. I also have a tremendous love for the priesthood, as it is through and by the priest that I am able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. I have and will continue to honor that vocation, which Father Norwood is called to live out well.

It is with great sorrow that I say goodbye to all of you, as I was not allowed the grace to exit in a dignified manner. I wish I could have said farewell in person but I was not given that opportunity.

God Bless you all for your support, words of encouragement, and prayers. Please keep them coming!

Love, peace, and prayers,

Karlene Duffy