

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

September 13, 2016

SENT VIA MAIL & EMAIL:  
parisi@countyofdane.com

Mr. Joe Parisi  
Dane County Executive  
210 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., Rm 421  
Madison WI 53703

Re: Proposed Catholic Charities Partnership

Dear County Executive Parisi:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Dane County members concerning a Dane County proposal for Catholic Charities Madison to run a county-funded resource center for the homeless. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization located in Madison that represents 24,000 members across the country, including more than 450 members in Dane County. Many of our members, including the Board of our affiliated charity, Nonbelief Relief, have been waiting with great concern for news about the opening of the respite center, and are anxious for progress to combat homelessness and assurances our local government is meeting basic needs of the homeless in our midst.

We are concerned about county government entanglement and advancement of religion if Dane County contracts with a sectarian group, Catholic Charities Madison to provide a publicly-paid and affiliated resource center for the homeless. The homeless come in all religious and nonreligious stripes, who, regardless of affiliation, are in desperate need of even-handed and secular facilities without fear of religious coercion or expectation of worship in order to utilize such services. Those of us taxpayers who are nonreligious, comprising 24 percent of the population, today outnumber rank and file Roman Catholics. Non-Catholic believers, whether Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Wiccan, Hindu, etc., are equally concerned with our tax dollars being used wisely and equitably to ameliorate conditions for the homeless in our county. The homeless include not just men and nonbelievers, but women of childbearing age who are in need of reproductive medical help, as well as the LGBTQ community. Catholic ideology is officially at loggerheads with reproductive rights and LGBTQ rights.

As you may be aware, the Catholic Charities Inc. Diocese of Madison has a religious mission:

**Catholic Charities serves as a visible presence of the Catholic Church of the Diocese of Madison by providing services that effectively address the physical,**

emotional, and **spiritual needs** of individuals and families, develop self-sufficiency, and protect, preserve, and promote the dignity of persons.<sup>1</sup>

Dane county resources should not be used to help provide “a visible presence of the Catholic Church” and should not be put toward “spiritual needs.”

While it is laudable that Catholic Charities works to address community needs, it has a distinctly Roman Catholic affiliation. The organization was recently described by the Wisconsin State Journal as being the “outreach arm of the church.” Catholic Charities headquarters is located alongside the Madison Catholic Diocese at Holy Name Heights. Bishop Robert Morlino describes the goals of Catholic Charities on its website in purely religious terms:

Let us go forward then in our shared mission so that good might overcome evil or be drawn out of evil according to God's Plan, His Providence which alone makes all things new. May the blessings of an always deeper faith, health and safety be with you and yours.<sup>2</sup>

Morlino remains a permanent ex-officio member of the Catholic Charities board.

Dane County residents are no doubt familiar with what Bishop Morlino views as “evil.” He notoriously said when ordaining six new priests following the landmark Supreme Court decision in 2015 that legalized gay marriage, “Our response to that fateful announcement is six new warriors against evil.”<sup>3</sup> His efforts to silence dissent and vilify LGBTQ persons and residents in the Madison community are well documented.<sup>4</sup>

Despite assurances from Catholic Charities that it “serve[s] and employ[s] persons regardless of sexual orientation, religious, ethnic, racial or social background,” we question how the organization can do so and remain true to church doctrine and the views of Bishop Morlino. What assurances will the county have that management positions within Catholic Charities will not take into consideration religion or sexual orientation?

We also question whether the resource center will be used to proselytize. What assurances will the county have that religious programming will not be offered at the center or promoted to those who are utilizing services? Will faith-based substance abuse treatment be part of programming at the center? We wonder what protections or prohibitions are in place to prevent Catholic Charities and Church representatives from setting up proselytizing shop at the respite center? We would consider such a use of this publicly funded facility to be contrary to the dictates of the Wisconsin and U.S. Constitutions.

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<sup>1</sup> 2014 IRS 990 Information Return. Available online: [goo.gl/B4Ym6u](http://goo.gl/B4Ym6u)

<sup>2</sup> <http://catholiccharitiesofmadison.org/About/FromOurBishop/tabid/344/Default.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Erickson, Doug. “In the Spirit: Madison Bishop Robert Morlino Not Pleased with Gay Marriage Ruling.” Wisconsin State Journal, 27 June 2015. Available online: [goo.gl/vMQKPa](http://goo.gl/vMQKPa)

<sup>4</sup> Erickson, Doug. “A Sampling of the Controversies Bishop Morlino Has Found Himself in.” Wisconsin State Journal. 29 July 2013. Available online: [goo.gl/sEd37J](http://goo.gl/sEd37J)

We are also gravely concerned whether women needing contraceptive services or seeking help ending an unwanted pregnancy could possibly feel they could turn to the new public respite center when it is being run by an arm of the Roman Catholic Church. How can this respite center not be perceived as a Catholic arm when it is run by a Catholic arm? How could any woman seeking to end an unwanted pregnancy feel she could turn for help to our new respite facility, even though it is supposed to be secular and even though the public is footing almost all of the bill? What provisions is the County making to ensure the respite center will honor civil rights and the right to be free from government-fostered religious ideology?

In terms of Catholic Charity employees, is the further problem engendered by the refusal of Catholic-related entities to subscribe to the rules promulgated under the Affordable Care Act to ensure that women employees have access to contraceptive insurance. The Catholic Church is behind much of the ongoing litigation over the Obama Administration's work to ensure that workers are covered. Has the County inquired into whether employees will be provided full medical care?

We understand that you have so far declined to provide records related to this grant proposal. There are many questions that need to be answered in terms of how the public center will operate as an open, secular entity under the direction of a Catholic organization.

It is not necessary for county government to partner with a religious organization to fulfill needed community services. While we are aware of Catholic Charity's generous pledge, we also fear this is a case where religion will get most of the credit for charity, while taxpayers will get almost all of the bill.

We urge you to instead partner with a secular organization or make arrangements so that the county itself is providing programming at the resource center. We look forward to hearing from you in writing at your earliest convenience.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annie Laurie Gaylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-President