# Teacher's play confronting gay discrimination in the church an off-Broadway hit



Matthew LaBanca, a former music teacher and church music director, has channelled his personal experiences of dismissal from the Catholic school system into an evocative off-Broadway solo play titled Communion. This theatrical performance delves into issues surrounding gay discrimination, specifically reflecting the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in religious institutions.

LaBanca, who had been working at St. Joseph Catholic Academy in Queens and serving as the music director at Corpus Christi Church, was dismissed from both roles on October 13, 2021. The catalyst for his dismissal was an anonymous complaint to the Diocese of Brooklyn regarding his marriage to his husband, Rowan, on August 1, 2021. The marriage was deemed incompatible with the church’s teachings on same-sex unions.

Communion presents a raw dramatization of LaBanca's journey, focusing on a pivotal phone call which informed him of his potential termination. Despite the church categorising all employees as 'ministers of the faith' and thereby subject to ecclesiastical teachings, LaBanca pointedly notes his role as a music teacher rather than a religious minister. During the play, LaBanca counters the firing by referencing Pope Francis' more inclusive stance towards the LGBTQ+ community: “If a person is gay and seeks God and has goodwill, who am I to judge?” However, this appeal is dismissed by Monsignor Jonas, representing the church’s unchanged doctrine.

The play not only sheds light on LaBanca’s personal grief and anger but also the broader implications of church policies on employees who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. It questions the consistency of the church's expectations for its employees by highlighting other aspects of church teachings, such as those on birth control and attendance, which often go unenforced.

Audience members have found the play to be deeply moving. Among them was David Harvie, known for organising an LGBTQ+ pilgrimage, who remarked on the persistent discrimination within the church and the spiritual harm it causes.

Communion is showing until December 8 at the cell theatre in Manhattan. LaBanca extends an open invitation to bishops to witness the play, hoping to foster understanding about the personal impact of such church policies. Despite his dismissal, LaBanca has since secured a position in a public school and remains steadfast in his belief that prioritising love prevails.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://communiontheplay.com/f/why-%E2%80%98communion%E2%80%99-matters-to-me> - Corroborates the personal story of Matthew LaBanca and the inspiration behind the play 'Communion'.
* <https://communiontheplay.com> - Provides details about the play 'Communion', including its themes and the real-life story of Matthew LaBanca.
* <https://glaad.org/communion-helps-glaadinstitute-alum-heal-after-discriminatory-termination-from-church/> - Details Matthew LaBanca's termination from the Catholic Church, the media response, and the themes of spiritual trauma in 'Communion'.
* <https://www.callmeadam.com/blog/matthew-labanca-interview-communion-play-praying-for-inclusion> - Includes an interview with Matthew LaBanca discussing the play 'Communion' and its themes of religious hypocrisy and spiritual trauma.
* <https://qns.com/2023/09/gay-woodside-music-teacher-story-performance/> - Describes Matthew LaBanca's experience as a gay Catholic school music teacher and choir director, and his subsequent firing.
* <https://communiontheplay.com> - Mentions the performance details and the impact of the play on the audience, including its run at the Cell Theatre.
* <https://glaad.org/communion-helps-glaadinstitute-alum-heal-after-discriminatory-termination-from-church/> - Explains the church's reasoning for LaBanca's dismissal and his role as a 'minister of the faith' despite not being a religious minister.
* <https://qns.com/2023/09/gay-woodside-music-teacher-story-performance/> - Highlights the personal grief and anger LaBanca experienced and the broader implications of church policies on LGBTQ employees.
* <https://communiontheplay.com> - Discusses the play's themes, including the inconsistency of church expectations and the spiritual harm caused by discrimination.
* <https://glaad.org/communion-helps-glaadinstitute-alum-heal-after-discriminatory-termination-from-church/> - Mentions LaBanca's decision to reject a settlement and his commitment to influencing change within the church's approach to LGBTQ employees.