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Silvia Carlucci and Domenico Fabiani, two employees who were fired by the Vatican Bank in October 2024, after their wedding violated a ban on workplace marriage, talk with their attorney, Laura Sgro, right, after an interview with The Associated Press in Rome, Monday, Jan. 27, 2025. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

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Rome — January 30, 2025

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Pope Francis has long urged couples to [marry and have babies](#) rather than dogs. And he has long championed the rights of workers and held up labor itself as the foundation of human dignity.

So it has come as something of a surprise to many in the Holy See that the Vatican bank [fired a newlywed couple](#), with three young children between them, after a new internal bank regulation went into effect barring workplace marriages.

The apparent contradiction between what the pope preaches and what his Vatican practices isn't lost on Silvia Carlucci and Domenico Fabiani, who on Thursday challenged the ban in a wrongful termination lawsuit before the Vatican tribunal.

During the hearing, presiding Judge Venerando Marano asked if the two sides would consider a settlement. The couple is open to a deal but the bank refused, said the couple's attorney Laura Sgro. A new hearing was scheduled for March 14.

Ahead of Thursday's hearing, the couple told The Associated Press this week that they never once considered calling off their Aug. 31, 2024, nuptials after learning of the new regulation. And they said they couldn't contemplate the bank's suggestion that one of them quit to avoid running afoul of the new rule, because of financial obligations to their children, former spouses and new mortgage.

"I thought for sure there might have been an intervention by the Holy Father, who rightly gives so much emphasis and value to the role of the family," Fabiani said in the office of his lawyer, with Carlucci by his side. "And yet here we find a family that works there and now finds itself on the street."

Grasping for her husband's hand, Carlucci was more blunt: "There's a great contrast between what truly happens (in the Vatican) and what is promoted."

A tipping point in employee discontent

The plight of the 41-year-olds, who between them worked for 25 years at the Institute for Religious Works, as the bank is known, has captured the attention of many in the Vatican, where employment has long been a coveted mark of status in overwhelmingly Catholic Italy. A Vatican job comes with real benefits: tax-free income, access to a duty-free gas station, supermarket, pharmacy and department store and if lucky, access to below-market rents in some of the Holy See's palazzi in Rome.

But for the past several years, amid [a financial crisis](#) that has resulted in hiring freezes, cuts to overtime, seniority bonuses and other benefits, employee discontent seems to be on the rise, with the Carlucci-Fabiani case something of a tipping point in a system where truly independent legal recourse doesn't exist.

The Association of Lay Vatican Employees, the closest thing the Vatican has to a labor union, has taken up the couple's cause, issuing an online solidarity appeal on their behalf. It has asserted that the new rule violates basic human rights as well as the Vatican's fundamental laws and the church's canon law, which in the Vatican take legal precedence over internal regulations.

"While we are confident that God will provide for them and their children, we cannot silence the voice of our conscience that recognizes the traits of injustice and lack of charity in the measure that affected these two former colleagues," the online appeal reads. "The application of a regulation, while necessary in the governance of any institution, cannot fail to take into account the fact that any institution is made up of people and stands by virtue of the activity and professionalism of these same people."

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The unusual role of the Vatican bank

The Institute for Religious Works, or IOR as it is known, is a peculiar institution, created in 1942 to help the church carry out its charitable mission while enabling Vatican embassies and religious orders in far-flung parts of the world to send and receive money when commercial banking might be problematic.

Located in a tower just steps inside Vatican City, the bank was [long mired in scandal](#) but spent over a decade cleaning up its books and ridding itself of its reputation as an offshore tax haven. The reforms [slimmed down its client base](#) to around 12,300 customers among Vatican offices, employees, religious orders and embassies, who are served by a staff of around 100 at its lone Vatican branch.

According to the couple, the bank management announced a new personnel policy on May 2, laying out criteria for employment that said marriage between an IOR employee and another bank employee, or anyone else who works in the Vatican City State, was cause for termination.

The change shocked them: Three months earlier, they had told bank management of their plans to wed after securing the Catholic decrees of nullity for their previous marriages. Carlucci got an advance on her yearly bonus to help secure their mortgage. They had formally publicized their pending nuptials in Rome city hall and their respective parishes.

"They congratulated us, 'A wedding, how wonderful this marriage. Great job, you made it,'" Carlucci recalls her superiors telling her.

But now, the couple doesn't even have access to Italian unemployment benefits because of the nature of their termination, she said.

Couple's employment terminated

The bank has strongly defended its policy as being consistent with best bank practices to promote transparency and impartiality and avoid conflicts of interest.

It says it actually delayed implementing the policy until the last of five married couples in its workforce had retired in March. With such a small staff and one branch, "this rule is in fact essential to prevent both inevitable professional conflicts of interest between the aspiring spouses concerned, as well as the emergence of possible familistic management doubts among its customers or the general public," it said in a statement.

And yet anyone familiar with the Vatican knows plenty of married partners who work in the city state, not necessarily in the same department but among the 4,500 people employed by the Holy See.

While expressing “deep regret,” the bank said it had “reached the difficult decision” to terminate the couple’s employment on Oct. 1, a month after their church wedding. It is unclear why the bank didn’t just terminate one of the two. A transfer to an unrelated Vatican office wasn’t possible under the terms of the new regulation.

The pope seems aware morale is low

The couple had written to Francis personally, hoping he might intervene, but received no reply.

Francis though seems keenly aware that employee morale is low and that times are tough for families. He recently approved the opening of the Vatican's first day-care center, as well as a “baby bonus” of an extra 300 euros a month for Vatican employees with three or more children.

During his annual Christmas greetings to Vatican personnel last month, dedicated to the theme of family and work, Francis urged employees to talk to their managers if they have problems.

“If anyone has any special difficulties, please speak up, tell the people in charge, because we want to solve all difficulties,” Francis told the Dec. 21 audience, attended by far fewer people than in past years. “And this is done by dialogue and [not by shouting](#) or being silent.”

Carlucci would like her job back, but says her new marriage and blended family matter more.

“For us, family is at the basis of our entire lives, so no matter what happens and despite everything, we have won,” she said.