

Nicholas Sparks Didn't Want an LGBTQ Club at His Private School

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Best-selling author Nicholas Sparks is making headlines, but not for one of his saccharine love stories, per usual — instead, he's facing damning new accusations of homophobia and racism.

While he's best known as a prolific writer of books meant to make you sentimental and weepy, Sparks also runs the Epiphany School, a private Christian academy in North Carolina that he founded in 2006. His time there has not been without scandal. Since 2014, he's been locked in a legal battle with former headmaster and CEO Saul Benjamin, who claimed in a lawsuit that Sparks "unapologetically marginalized, bullied, and harassed members of the school community ...whose religious views and/or identities did not conform to their religiously driven, bigoted preconceptions."

From here on out, it'll be hard for Sparks to argue otherwise: On Thursday, the Daily Beast obtained and published some of the incriminating emails Sparks sent to Benjamin. In them, he opposed the formation of an LGBTQ club and insisted that his school's lack of diversity wasn't his fault.

In one email from 2013, Sparks condemned Benjamin for having "an agenda that strives to make homosexuality open and accepted" and chastised him for adding protections based on sexual orientation to the school's nondiscrimination policy.

"About the non-discrimination policy you keep bringing up: please remember that sexual orientation was NOT in there originally, and that the *only* reason it was added was that YOU insisted it be specifically be added," Sparks wrote. "Frankly, no one but you wanted it in there ... If possible, we might be able to change it back to what it was before."

In the same message, Sparks suggested a ban on student demonstrations — a move that "came directly in response to two lesbian girls planning to announce their orientation during chapel," per the Daily Beast. He also, in multiple emails, reiterated that he opposed the formation of an LGBTQ club — or, in his words, "a GLBT club," arguing that doing so was "NOT discrimination." (He even pulls a "remember, we've had gay students before, many of them," in one of the emails.)

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And Sparks's answer to an assertion that Epiphany Academy isn't diverse? Well, it's simply not his fault.

"Regarding diversity, I've now told you half a dozen times that our lack of diversity has NOTHING to do with the school or anyone at the school," he wrote in an email to Benjamin. "It's not because of what we as a school has or hasn't done. It has nothing to do with racism or vestiges of Jim Crow. It comes down to 1) Money and 2) Culture."

In response to the Daily Beast's report, Sparks accused the publication of repeating "false allegations" in a statement on Twitter, asserting that "Epiphany is and remains a place where students and faculty of any race, belief, religion, background or orientation should feel comfortable."

pic.twitter.com/y4nZX6TByD

— Nicholas Sparks (@NicholasSparks) June 13, 2019

Just as long as they don't try to form an innocent club, right?