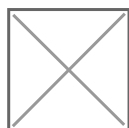




An illustration shows a sonogram image. Jadira Bonilla, a 35-year-old kindergarten teacher at St. Mary Catholic School in Vineland, N.J., is on paid administrative leave while the Diocese of Camden investigates and engages with her pastorally after learning of her recent decision to become a surrogate mother, according to statements provided to OSV News Oct. 1, 2025, by the diocese. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

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Camden, NJ — October 2, 2025

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A Catholic school educator in New Jersey has been pulled from her classroom, after she advised a school official her pregnancy was a surrogacy — a practice gravely contrary to Church teaching — while the church engages her in a pastoral conversation over the matter.

Jadira Bonilla, a Catholic who teaches kindergarten at St. Mary School in Vineland, New Jersey, is "currently on paid administrative leave," said Principal Steven Hogan, in a statement provided to OSV News Oct. 1 by the Diocese of Camden, of which the school is a part.

In an interview with Philadelphia television station 6ABC aired Sept. 26, the 35-year-old Bonilla said about two weeks prior, she had revealed to a school administrator she was carrying a baby for a couple.

But Bonilla also told 6ABC she was surprised by the school's reaction to the news, since she had previously given birth to a child for the same couple while working in Catholic education at another institution.

"Me, not thinking anything of it, not thinking I'm doing anything wrong, because the first time I was a surrogate, I was at a different Catholic school, I said, 'Oh, I'm going to be a surrogate,'" Bonilla said in the interview.

The school official, whom she did not name, "looked at me and said, 'You are renting your uterus?'" Bonilla told the television station.

6ABC reported that a few days after her disclosure at St. Mary's, Bonilla was summoned to meet with both school and church officials.

"They said I was possibly in violation of my contract and that I would be suspended or placed on administrative leave," she said.

The Diocese of Camden's personnel handbook states that "all employees, regardless of their position, are expected to follow certain basic rules of conduct consistent with a workplace which is part of the Catholic Church."

Disciplinary action and possible termination of employment can result from "conduct which is dishonest, immoral, illegal, or contrary to the doctrines and teachings of the Catholic Church," the diocese said in its handbook, including in its non-exhaustive list of examples "conduct inconsistent with, or contrary to, the teachings of the Catholic Church or not in keeping with the spirit and religious character of the Diocese."

Bonilla said being placed on leave from St. Mary's has been "overwhelming" and "stressful."

"What's going to happen to my job?" she said.

In his statement, Hogan said, "We certainly understand Mrs. Bonilla's concern," noting that "it has been our hope to meet with her to help her fully understand the Catholic Church's teaching on surrogacy."

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A spokesperson for the Diocese of Camden confirmed to OSV News by email that "a pastoral conversation on the Catholic perspective took place Saturday, September 27, and that there has been no change to her employment status."

In a Sept. 27 interview with The New York Times, Bonilla shared what motivated her to become a surrogate mother after talking with her husband. She said that she approached a surrogacy agency in 2018 after having read a BuzzFeed article about the heartache of infertility that left her "sobbing her eyes out" and wishing "there was something I could do."

After giving birth to a baby boy in 2022, Bonilla told the newspaper she "didn't hesitate" when the couple approached her again.

But the Catholic Church's opposition to surrogacy is rooted in its teaching on the good of human sexuality, the goods of marriage — including the good of the spouses as male and female and the gift of children — and the flourishing of family life, which

are all ordered to God's plan of love that also reveals God's love for humanity.

In 1987 the Vatican's Congregation (now Dicastery) for the Doctrine of the Faith issued specific instruction on the dignity of procreation in light of several issues, including surrogacy, which encompasses any such pregnancy, regardless of whether the woman is genetically related to the unborn child.

The teaching explained that surrogate motherhood is not morally permissible, since it "represents an objective failure to meet the obligations of maternal love, of conjugal fidelity and of responsible motherhood."

The practice also "offends the dignity and the right of the child to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up by his own parents." The instruction also explained the practice "sets up, to the detriment of families, a division between the physical, psychological and moral elements which constitute those families."

Church teaching on surrogacy has been restated in several successive documents, with the late Pope Francis advising in a 2024 audience with Holy See-accredited diplomats that surrogacy "represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs." He said the "deplorable" practice should be banned.

"A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract," Francis said during that audience.

As of Oct. 2, Bonilla's image and bio — the latter of which notes she has two children with her husband — are still listed on the school website.

"Mrs. Bonilla is a valued teacher," Hogan said in his statement, "and one we hope will one day again teach in our school with the full understanding and acknowledgement of our faith which guides our educational principles."