

# CATHOLIC LEAGUE FOR RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL RIGHTS 2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

## Catholic League For Religious And Civil Rights 2022 Year in Review

**Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications**

The forces working to undermine the Catholic Church and our Judeo-Christian values doubled-down in 2022. One might expect a traditional-minded organization to focus on mitigating losses; however, the Catholic League went on the offense undertaking many bold projects and played a significant part in the major culture war victories of the last year.

The biggest of these projects was the making of our documentary “Walt’s Disenchanted Kingdom: How Disney is Losing its Way.” It has a star-studded cast, and Jason Meath, the film’s director, did a magnificent job. We anticipate it will garner a wide audience when it is released in January 2023.

Another major undertaking was a survey of Catholics for the 60th anniversary of Vatican II. We did this to counter the narrative that Catholics were largely dissatisfied with the Church and wanted to see changes. To this end, we contracted McLaughlin & Associates to conduct the poll. They did great work, and the results will greatly help us set the record straight for years to come.

We also filed an amicus brief in *303 Creative LLC v Elenis*. This case involves a Christian web designer, Lorie Smith, who launched a preemptive strike against the Colorado Anti-Discrimination Act: it would require her to build wedding websites for “gay marriages.” Represented by the Pittsburgh law firm of Gallagher Giancola, we support Lorie Smith in her

quest to maintain her First Amendment rights. The Supreme Court will rule on this in 2023.

While we undertook these bold projects, there were several key victories before the high court. One case involved the religious rights of a football coach, who lost his job because he prayed on the field following games. The other involved the state of Maine discriminating against religious schools.

While both of these victories are important, the most critical decision from the Supreme Court in 2022 was the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*. After nearly 50 years of determined efforts by Catholics across the country, Justice Samuel Alito, writing for the 5-4 majority in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, held that “*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences.” That is why, he said, “It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.”

Many organizations, particularly the Catholic Church, kept the fight for life going over the years, and in doing so, they contributed to this victory. We, too, played an active role in keeping this issue in front of the public through scores media appearances.

Even before the ruling came out, the pro-abortion fanatics desecrated two of the most prominent Catholic churches in the nation. On January 20, during the Vigil for Life at the National Basilica in D.C., Catholics for Choice used a light projector to broadcast their anti-Catholic message.

Two days later, another anti-Catholic outfit, New York City for Abortion Rights, projected “God Loves Abortion” and other vile slogans on the exterior of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Supporters of the group shouted obscenities at pro-life Catholics entering and exiting the Cathedral.

Then in May, when a draft decision was leaked suggesting the

Supreme Court was prepared to overturn *Roe*, the pro-abortion fanatics began to increase their violence. When the court ultimately ruled in June, things reached a fever pitch.

We put together a representative list of the incidents of violence against Catholics so we could call for action from the proper authorities.

To this end, we sent a letter to Attorney General Merrick Garland asking him to investigate Jane's Revenge, a radical pro-abortion group that uses domestic terrorists' tactics. Rather than take action against physical violence perpetrated against Catholics, the leadership of the overtly politicized Department of Justice (DOJ) chose to target pro-life activists instead.

On September 23, a Catholic pro-life activist, Mark Houck, was arrested by two dozen FBI agents—they came into his house with guns drawn—for allegedly violating the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act.

This kind of overreaction for a minor infraction of the law is deeply troubling, and it becomes even more troubling when paired with the DOJ's under-reaction to attacks on the pro-life side.

We wrote to the FBI and DOJ about this, but when they did not get back to us, we contacted several congressional leaders calling on them to hold the FBI and DOJ to accountable.

While it is troubling enough for Federal law enforcement to target Catholics, equally disturbing was the silence of prominent Catholics in Washington when pro-abortion radicals attacked Catholics. Both President Joe Biden and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, "devout Catholics," remained mute on these instances of violence.

For his part, Biden has grown more radical over the years in his support for abortion. This is evident in the people he has

working around him. Six of the eight Catholics in his cabinet have long track records of championing abortion. Another prominent figure in Biden's White House is John Podesta, who previously tried to orchestrate a "Catholic Spring" to encourage Catholics to revolt against Church teachings.

In the aftermath of the *Dobbs* decision, even the corporations decided to join the radicals on the abortion issue. We made a tally of the companies that announced they would pay for abortions in their healthcare plans, thus short-circuiting states with laws protecting the unborn.

In addition to abortion, transgenderism—the dangerous idea that the sexes are interchangeable—was another major flashpoint in the culture war in 2022.

While it is bad enough that the Biden administration is promoting this fantasy, it took steps to thwart efforts by the states to protect children and promote the truth. Fortunately, several governors, particularly FL Gov. Ron DeSantis, pushed back against Biden's tyrannical tactics.

But Biden's most dangerous proposal was the effort to amend Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (a.k.a. ObamaCare) to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex to include "sexual orientation and gender identity." This would utterly shatter the religious liberty protections of Catholic hospitals and force them to provide transgender services. Beyond infringing on the First Amendment rights of Catholics, it would threaten the well-being of children.

During the public comment period, we asked Catholic League members to register their complaints by strongly emphasizing this threat to religious liberty. While this might not have been enough to totally deter Biden from his objective, it sent a strong message to Washington.

While the Biden Administration was promoting transgenderism and actively undermining religious liberty, the courts were

pushing back. Two appellate courts ruled that other Biden initiatives could not force Catholic hospitals and doctors to perform transgender procedures.

Additionally, corporations joined in promoting transgenderism in the past year. Twitter was one of the worst offenders. This prompted us to send a letter to Twitter after the company began sanctioning people for complaining about a male University of Pennsylvania swimmer competing on the women's team.

But perhaps the biggest promoter of transgenderism was academia. We even had to call out the U.S. Air Force Academy for promoting it. Many prestigious private schools, too, taught this twisted ideology to young students behind their parents backs.

The most egregious incident occurred at Tennessee Tech when a drag performer partnered with a student group to put on a display of anti-Catholic bigotry. Fortunately, the university president condemned this outrage cancelling all campus events by the groups involved. He said that he was "also offended by disparaging mockery toward any religious group."

In addition to being heavily involved in the fight against abortion and transgenderism, we had to contend with expressions of anti-Catholicism that we thought were long over.

We had to deal with Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene. She insulted Catholics by saying "Satan's controlling the Church." We called for an apology. When she refused, we sent a letter to the House Ethics Committee calling on them to levy sanctions against her for her anti-Catholic remarks. Greene is an outspoken Republican, and this exchange highlighted our independent streak.

Additionally, we had to call for an investigation of a DOJ lawyer who labeled organizations promoting religious liberty

“hate groups.”

We had to intervene after Bridget Fleming, a member of the legislature for Suffolk County, Long Island, introduced a resolution that would have forced all prayers before official business to be “neutral.” We quickly sprung into action and within hours, Fleming’s resolution was dead. We were happy to help because this resolution was in response to an invocation led by Msgr. Robert Batule, who is on our board of directors.

We also had to get involved when the assistant principle of a school in Connecticut was caught on camera saying he would never hire a Catholic teacher “because if someone is raised hardcore Catholic, it’s like they are brainwashed.” We wasted no time contacting officials across the state to hold him accountable.

The media have long been an antagonist of Catholics, and 2022 was no exception. In the fall the Associated Press published a hit piece complaining about the confessional seal. It had no evidence to back up its claim. When we asked the authors to see their evidence, they never got back to us.

The forces seeking to undermine our Judeo-Christian heritage love attacking Christmas, and this year was no exception. In Massachusetts, a human rights commissioner was forced to resign after making anti-Christian statements when residents wanted to display a Christmas tree in the town’s public library.

We contacted over 350 Catholics associated with Cardinal Newman chapters at colleges and universities asking them to let us know of any anti-Catholic activities around Christmas.

We condemned a play at Harvard that reimagined Jesus as a “gay Asian.” We sounded the alarm over several bloody horror movies with Christmas settings. We confronted government officials in King County Washington seeking to limit their employees abilities to display Christmas decorations. We also called out

a Christmas parade in Texas that included drag queens.

In a more tasteful salute to the season, we continued the decades-long tradition of displaying a nativity scene in Central Park. We do this every year not only to honor the birth of Christ, but also to help educate others who wish to display a crèche on public property about the rules.

In 2022, we were delighted to learn our work continues to earn recognition.

Bill Donohue was featured in a documentary on Mother Teresa that originally aired in May on Sky in the U.K. and Ireland; it was also seen in Israel and Australia.

Donohue also received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from Ave Maria Law School. Additionally, the *Catholic Herald* named him as one of the top Catholic Leaders in the United States for 2022.

While the forces working against the Catholic Church and traditional Judeo-Christian values were in overdrive in 2022, we responded with equal vigor. We undertook several major projects and played a part in the important victories in the culture war this year.