

BID TO CENSOR PRIEST FAILS; GWU FALTERS, REBOUNDS

On April 4, news reports said that a Catholic priest, Father Greg Shaffer, was under fire by two homosexual students at George Washington University (GWU). His crime? He holds to Church teachings on homosexuality and abortion.

On the same day the story broke, Bill Donohue contacted every senior administrative official on the campus warning them of the civil liberties issues involved. He vigorously defended Father Shaffer, the Chaplain of the Newman Center, and pledged to fight for his rights.

In his open letter to GWU officials, Donohue said, "Nothing that has been reported by the media suggests that Father Shaffer has said anything inflammatory about these subjects, and the students themselves do not offer any evidence of abusive speech or behavior."

Donohue made it clear that this issue "transcends Father Shaffer: it is an attack on the freedom of expression of Catholics on campus to discuss their religious beliefs and practices with impunity. In short, this is a civil liberties issue involving both freedom of religion and freedom of speech."

Neither of the students who made the complaint was Catholic. One belonged to some faux Catholic entity, and the other was an agnostic Jew. What angered them most was the refusal of Father Shaffer to give his blessing to their homosexual relationship.

After Catholic League members who receive our news releases contacted GWU, the university was forced to respond. It said it "strives to embody the spirit of mutual respect and reasoned debate that is essential to our academic mission. We

are therefore committed to ensuring that all members of our community are free to express their religious beliefs while honoring the right of others to express theirs.”

Donohue replied saying, “This is classic doublespeak. There is only one party to this controversy that has crossed the line, and it isn’t Father Shaffer. The attempt to silence him shows nothing but contempt for diversity and tolerance, the twin towers of academic virtue these days.”

Here’s the good news: immediately following this news release on April 12, the provost told the Faculty Senate that GWU defends Father Shaffer’s freedom of speech. We hasten to add that the Archdiocese of Washington played a key role by issuing stinging statements on the way GWU responded.

It is unfortunate that this issue had to surface in the first place, but we are delighted that Father Shaffer’s rights will be protected. We are also happy to note that the Newman Center will receive an increase in funding from the Student Association next fall.