

# **BIGOTRY MARS H.S. GAME; SCOTTSDALE PROBE LAUNCHED**

Two related anti-Catholic incidents took place over Labor Day weekend involving a high school football game in Scottsdale, Arizona. After parents complained, and the Catholic League contacted school officials, an investigation was launched. We were pleased with the response.

Our cause for concern was twofold: prior to a football game between Notre Dame Prep and Desert Mountain High School, a statue of Our Blessed Mother was vandalized on the campus of the Catholic school; during the game at Desert Mountain, a student dressed as Jesus paraded up and down the sidelines, mocking Catholics.

To be specific, a sex toy was attached to the lower half of the statue of Our Blessed Mother, and a Hillary Clinton mask was put over its head. The “dancing Jesus” character who mocked Catholics continued his stunt in the second half of the game, even after parents complained earlier to security guards.

Catholic League director of communications Rick Hinshaw contacted officials at both schools. He emphasized that we did not see these two incidents as harmless school pranks; rather, we saw them as coordinated assaults on our religion. Had it been the sacred icons of other religions that were trashed, calls for a hate crimes investigation would have been made. The initial response from administrators was encouraging.

The next day, a more formal statement was issued that put to rest our fears.

Dr. A. Denise Birdwell, the Scottsdale Unified School District Interim Superintendent, emailed us a letter that was both responsible and pointed. “On behalf of the Scottsdale Unified

School District and Desert Mountain High School," she wrote, "I want to apologize to you and the entire Catholic community." She emphasized that she found the behavior "disgraceful, disrespectful and unacceptable."

She also met with leaders from Notre Dame Prep to apologize. "We, as educators," she said, "have a profound responsibility to coach our young people—first, on how to behave and second, on how to respond to others' unfortunate behavior."

An investigation was immediately launched.

Dr. Birdwell also thanked the Catholic League "for the role you play in educating all people to recognize the difference between right and wrong and, above all else, to respect one another." She added, "We aim to do the same."

This is a textbook case of the way incidents such as this should be handled by school officials. We commend Dr. Birdwell and all the administrators at Desert Mountain and Notre Dame Prep for their attention to these offensive actions.