

FIRED FOR SAYING “GOD BLESS YOU”

A New Hampshire Catholic woman was recently fired as a ballot clerk for saying “God bless you” as voters left the polls. Below is a copy of Bill Donohue’s letter sent to New Hampshire Secretary of State William Gardner.

November 7, 2014

Mr. William M. Gardner
Secretary of State
State House, Room 204
107 North Main St.
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Secretary Gardner:

It has come to my attention that ballot clerk Ruth Provencal was fired on October 30 by Renee Routhier, chairman of Derry’s Supervisors of the Checklist. Ms. Provencal was terminated for violating New Hampshire state law, RSA 659:44. The law reads as follows: “No election officer shall electioneer while in performance of his official duties. For the purposes of this section, ‘electioneer’ shall mean to act in any way specifically designed to influence the vote of a voter on any question or office. Any person who violates this provision shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.”

The law is entirely reasonable. The application of it in this instance is entirely unreasonable: Ms. Provencal, a practicing Catholic, was fired for saying “God bless you” to voters as they left the polls on primary day September 9. She has also been known to say “God bless you” when a voter sneezes.

As president of the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization, I would like to know what part of this law was

violated by Ms. Provencal? Has any voter registered a complaint? If so, how did her remark influence the voter's decision? Moreover, because Ms. Provencal made her allegedly offensive remark after voters had cast their ballot, it would be instructive to know how she could have influenced their decision. Perhaps Ms. Routhier can explain. I would be happy to publish her comments in our monthly journal, *Catalyst*.

The U.S. Supreme Court opens every session by saying, "God Bless the United States and this Honorable Court." Now if saying "God bless you" is proof of undue influence on a voter's decision, it seems logical to conclude that the Justices of the Supreme Court are compromising their rulings by allowing this invocation.

In all honesty, Secretary Gardner, are not these two examples demonstrative of borderline insanity?

More seriously, any fair-minded person, including committed atheists, would no doubt conclude that the offender in this case is not Ms. Provencal—it is Ms. Routhier.

I look forward to your response. Thank you for your consideration.