

# FLORIDA STUDENT ABUSES EUCCHARIST

On June 29, Webster Cook, a student senator at the University of Central Florida (UCF), walked out of a campus Mass with the Eucharist; he returned it a week later. Cook stated that he took the Eucharist back to his seat to show a friend, and only left after a parishioner confronted him about not consuming it.

In another statement after the incident, Cook seemed to muddle his intentions by voicing his discontent that UCF uses student fees to fund religious services at the university. He said, "The problem is actually that this is a publicly-funded institution. Through student government here, we fund them through an activity and service, so they're receiving student money."

During the week Cook held the Host hostage, local Catholic officials pleaded with him to return it and not to desecrate it. He returned it to the church a week later, only minutes before the Mass began.

Shortly after the incident we commented that regardless of the alleged nature of his grievance, Cook's action was beyond hate speech. We called on the UCF administration to act swiftly and decisively in seeing that justice be done. We said that all options should be left on the table, including expulsion.

We encouraged our members to contact UCF's President John C. Hitt and voice their opinions on this matter. After our members inundated his mailbox, Hitt issued a statement:

*"UCF takes this situation seriously and we are glad to know the student has returned the Eucharist and written a letter of apology. We encourage students to express their views respectfully, and we expect them to comply with university*

*codes of conduct.*

*“Any disciplinary action will be handled through the university’s student judicial system, per our published procedure.”*

On July 17, Webster Cook was impeached by the student government in a 33-2 vote; the impeachment had no effect on his status as a student. Before the vote, UCF’s senate speaker said, “The situation involving Senator Cook and the Catholic Campus Ministry is an isolated event and one that has interfered with our true purpose.”

In August, a panel of students and administrators, convened to determine whether or not Cook violated the code of student discipline, unanimously voted to dismiss all charges against him despite the range of options available to punish this act. At the very least, a disciplinary warning was warranted to send a message that the concerns of Catholics are taken seriously at UCF.