

HOUSE CHAPLAIN ISSUE NEEDS VETTING

At a press conference yesterday, House Speaker Dennis Hastert was asked a question regarding the controversy over the appointment of the new House Chaplain. His answer did not satisfy Catholic League president William Donohue; he now explains why:

"I have written two letters today that are being faxed to the appropriate congressmen regarding the House Chaplain issue. One letter, which is being sent to the nine Republicans and nine Democrats on the selection committee, asks the following: 'Specifically, I would like to know a) who you thought was the best candidate for the job b) to whom, if anyone, did you make your choice known and c) whether you know if the collective ranking of the selection committee was given to Rep. Dennis Hastert, Rep. Dick Armey and Rep. Dick Gephardt.'

"The other letter, which is being sent to Hastert, Armey and Gephardt, asks 'were you aware when you voted for Rev. Charles Wright that it was the consensus of the selection committee that Father Timothy O'Brien was its first choice and Rev. Wright was its third choice? If so, did you share that information with the two other congressmen who made the final selection?'

"The position of Rep. Hastert and Rep. Armey, the two responsible for rejecting Father O'Brien, is that the Catholic priest lacked sufficient pastoral experience to get the job. This raises the question why only two of the 21 congressmen involved in the selection process (the 18 on the committee plus Gephardt) came to this conclusion.

"Also, we are supporting Rep. John Dingell's request for full disclosure on this matter. That a priest was asked if wearing

a Roman collar might be seen as divisive—when the outgoing Lutheran chaplain has been wearing one for the last 21 years—is outrageous. It is also outrageous to call into question Father O'Brien's counseling abilities simply because he is a single, celibate male. We want to know what's behind these questions."