

# KANSAS CITY STAR'S OBSESSION WITH PRIESTS AND AIDS

Last January, the *Kansas City Star* released a sex survey of Roman Catholic priests that purported to show that priests were dying of AIDS at a rate much higher than the general population. Now the same newspaper has released new findings, this time saying that more than 300 AIDS-related priest deaths have been documented. The latest findings were reported on November 5.

William Donohue read the initial survey and the latest report. He also contacted the person at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Richard Selik, who was approvingly cited in the November 5 article. What he found was interesting, which is why he shared the following comments with the media:

“In its first sex survey of priests, the *Kansas City Star* found that 0.5% of priests had HIV or AIDS, 0.4% answered that they may have the disease, and 99.1% said they did not. Because these data were not on the order of the crisis that the *Star* wanted to project, it spent the rest of 2000 combing death certificates looking for what it wanted to show. So now it claims to have uncovered evidence that between 1987 and 1998 there were some 300 cases where priests died of AIDS. To buttress its claims, it cites Richard Selik of the CDC.

“It is true that Selik said there is a significant difference between the AIDS death rate of priests and the AIDS death rate of other adult males. However, when I spoke to him yesterday, he made it clear that by ‘significant’ all he meant was that the difference was unlikely to be the result of chance. He emphasized that nothing else was implied.

“Selik also told me that the *Star's* latest data contained at least two limitations: a) the comparisons between priests and

the adult male population were not age adjusted, meaning that one group could have had a disproportionately higher number of men in the AIDS-at-risk population and b) the data were culled from just 14 states and therefore may not be representative of the country. In any event, Selik said that even by the *Star's* own data, we're still talking about two-dozen deaths a year due to AIDS. This is hardly the stuff of a major crisis given that there are more than 47,000 priests in the U.S.

"In the end, the biggest problem is the *Star's* determination to invent a crisis by engaging in necromania. Quite simply, its agenda is to pressure the Church to change its teachings on celibacy and homosexuality."

The *Kansas City Star* refuses to drop this issue, and so do we. That is why members are urged to contact Mark Zieman, vice president and editor, *Kansas City Star*, 1729 Grand Blvd., Kansas City, MO 64108. You can e-mail him at [zieman@kcstar.com](mailto:zieman@kcstar.com) or call him at (816) 234-4141; his fax is (816) 234-4923. We're sure he'd love to hear from you.

You might try asking him when he's planning to do a series on gay activists and AIDS. Or better yet, ask him why Donohue never heard from all the reporters at the *Star* whom he sent his sex survey to last winter (it was modeled after the one the *Star* sent to priests). Among other things, Donohue wanted to know how many reporters at the newspaper *don't* have AIDS.