

KUDOS TO BISHOP JARRELL

Bill Donohue was recently invited by The Daily Advertiser to write an op-ed on August 23 in defense of Lafayette Bishop Michael Jarrell's decision not to publish the names of 15 priests who were accused of abuse prior to 1984:

Kudos to Lafayette Bishop Michael Jarrell for not publishing the names of priests accused of a sexual offense. His decision is identical to the one that the leaders of every other institution, public and private, have long come to: it is unethical to do so. Why should the Catholic Church be any different?

A reporter came to my office a few years ago asking me about this issue. Specifically, she asked how I could defend a bishop for not posting the names of accused priests on his diocesan website. I immediately asked for her boss' name and phone number. She wanted to know why. "Because I am going to report you for sexually harassing me, and then I want to see if your name is going to be posted on the website of your cable news employer." She got the point.

I am the CEO of the Catholic League. If someone called me making an accusation against one of my staff members, I can assure you I would not call the cops. No employer would. I would do the same as everyone else: I would conduct my own internal investigation, and would only go to the authorities if I thought the charge was authentic.

There is a profound difference between an accusation, a credible accusation, a substantiated accusation, and a finding of guilt. The assumption behind all three levels of accusations is that the accused is innocent, yet this seems not to matter much anymore, especially when the accused is a priest.

The leader of a professional victims' group maintains that we

need to know the names of the credibly accused priests in Lafayette so that parents can protect their children. Nonsense. Of the 15 priests, seven are dead, five have moved away, and three are retired. None is in ministry. Moreover, all the accusations stem from alleged offenses dating back prior to 1984. In short, it is more than hype to suggest that kids are in danger—it is expressly demagogic, designed to whip up public sentiment against priests.

What is really sickening about this issue is that so many decent and innocent priests have had their reputations ruined by vicious accusers who remain anonymous. No one demands that we make public the names of the accusers, but somehow we are all supposed to know the identity of the accused. Correction: only when it comes to priests are demands made to publish the names of the accused.

The *New York Times* has a Business Ethics Policy that reads, “Any employee who becomes aware of any conduct that he or she believes to be prohibited by this Policy *or a violation of the law*...is expected to promptly report the facts forming the basis of that belief or knowledge to any supervisor of the legal department” (my italics).

In other words, crimes of a sexual nature need not be reported to the police, just the legal department. If this policy is good for reporters, why isn't it good for bishops? The best part of the *Times'* policy says that those who make false accusations are subject “to discipline up to and including termination.” The bishops should adopt this policy immediately.

I am so proud of Bishop Jarrell for acting fairly and courageously.