

League Enters Arizona Harassment Case

In June, 1993, Beverly Rutt quit her job at Specialty Graphics in Phoenix, Arizona. She quit as a result of on-going sexual harassment, much of it aimed at her because she was a Catholic. When she filed for unemployment compensation, she was denied on the basis of her employer's complaint that she harassed fellow workers by displaying a picture of an aborted fetus on her desk.

Though no one in the office complained about the picture when Ms. Rutt was working at Specialty Graphics, it was now being trotted out as a reason to deny her benefits. Upon a request from Ms. Rutt, the Catholic League has filed a complaint of its own, both with the City of Phoenix's Equal Opportunity Department and with the Arizona Appeals Board.

For several months, Ms. Rutt, who was known to all employees as a proud Catholic, was subjected to a steady stream of sexually explicit jokes, some of which were gruesome in detail. Over the loudspeaker system four-letter words were frequently uttered, all in the name of what the offending parties considered to be fun. When Ms. Rutt would complain, the problem would subside for a bit, only to resurface shortly thereafter. All her complaints were sympathetically listened to, but no action was ever taken to stop the sexual harassment from reoccurring. The Catholic League informed the Arizona authorities of its position by stating that "no one needs to endure a pattern of sexually explicit language in the workplace, not especially when some of the language was so pervasive (e.g. it was broadcast over the PA system) that it could not be avoided. In addition, it was well-known to Ms. Rutt's coworkers that she was a Roman Catholic and would not take kindly to such abuse."

The matter is now pending a decision.