

# LEAGUE SUCCEEDS IN DEFENDING CALIFORNIA PRIEST

In April, the Catholic League was notified about an egregious offense committed against a Catholic priest in California that took place in November 1995. The league intervened in the case and it was favorably resolved. But for several reasons, we have decided not to disclose the actual names of the parties involved or the institutions that were implicated. Therefore, the names of the parties and the institutions that will be discussed are fictitious, though the account of what happened is accurate.

Printed below is the letter sent by William Donohue to the person in charge of the institution where the incident occurred; it explains the case in full.

April 11, 1996

Mr. Robert Smith  
CEO, St. Anne's Hospital  
1 Main St.  
Central City, CA 90000

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am writing to you about a most serious violation of professional ethics and civil rights that has occurred at St. Anne's Hospital. To be specific, this case involves the miscreant behavior of Rev. John Doe, the coordinator of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE), and the irresponsibility of Ms. Jane Fox, Director of Pastoral Care. The person who brought this case to our attention is Fr. Thomas Jones, who is also the subject of the incident in this case. On November 28, 1995, in the Clinical Pastoral Education course taught by Rev. Doe, a Lutheran minister, a student (Sally Cook) expressed her disappointment at not being selected for a

Catholic chaplaincy position in a Catholic hospital. Rev. Doe indignantly shouted, "Those f—g priests." Fr. Jones protested, saying "I resent that remark." Ms. Fox, a supervisor-in-training, and the six students in the class all heard the exchange.

Fr. Jones, obviously shaken by what happened, considered several courses of action, including notifying you. But before he decided on doing anything, Rev. Doe and Ms. Fox began badgering him in a subsequent class, asking Fr. Jones to explain his "anger." Fr. Jones told the class that he considered this to be a matter between himself and his supervisor.

Ms. Fox insisted that Fr. Jones discuss his "feelings" in class, explaining that she considered his "anger" to be "group" material. Fr. Jones, who spoke reluctantly, said he wanted Rev. Doe to clarify his remark and asked Ms. Fox to say whether she condoned Rev. Doe's comment. He also asked for an apology. But Rev. Doe and Ms. Fox not only refused to yield, they made it clear that they resented being asked such questions by Fr. Jones. When Fr. Jones met with Rev. Doe, he informed him that he was giving consideration to filing a grievance. Rev. Doe said he could lose his job if such action were taken, thereby admitting culpability. Fr. Jones then said that if an apology was granted in class, and a pledge was made never to repeat the offense, he would consider dropping the matter altogether. Rev. Doe made good on his apology in class, but prefaced his remarks by saying that he was threatened with a grievance by Fr. Jones, thus vitiating the apology.

When Fr. Jones met with Ms. Fox, he asked her if she approved of Rev. Doe's comment about "those f—g priests." She was evasive and showed more interest in discussing Fr. Jones' "feelings."

The result of this series of encounters was predictable: in

his final evaluation of Fr. Jones, Rev. Doe said: "I would be hard pressed to recommend to Tom to do more CPE." He came to this determination absent any reference to Fr. Jones' actual clinical ministry which was performed (with permission of Ms. Fox) at St. Anselm's Medical Center. Rev. Doe came to his conclusion by selectively choosing comments from Fr. Jones' class participation, family history and written reports so that the reader's impression of Fr. Jones' work would yield the expected results. Incredibly, Rev. Doe actually mentioned what happened on November 28 and labeled it a "significant encounter." Indeed, he admitted using "a four letter word, generically addressing priests," stating that it was an example of the "stormy relationship" he had with Fr. Jones. Rev. Doe then added that Fr. Jones was "the only one who saw the remark as offensive," which, of course, belies his own fear that if a grievance were filed, he could lose his job. Adding insult to injury, Rev. Doe stated in his evaluation that Fr. Jones "did not explore" what made him angry, contending that he doesn't know why Fr. Jones was offended.

I understand that in order for a Catholic priest to minister in hospitals that it is imperative to complete four units of CPE. This was Fr. Jones' first unit.

The Catholic League is making this case a priority. We will not rest until justice has been done. That would seem to require two things: a) action must be taken against Rev. Doe and Ms. Fox that is proportionate to the offense they have committed and b) a reevaluation of Fr. Jones' CPE course work, and his suitability to continue in the program, must be made.

As president of the nation's largest Catholic civil rights organization, it is my job to defend individual Catholics and the institutional Church against defamation and discrimination. We do this in many ways: through lawsuits, news releases to the media, contacting officials in

government, religion and education, etc. Indeed, our monthly publication, Catalyst, reaches every Bishop and Congressman in the country, as well as our more than 200,000 members nationwide.

I am also disturbed by what happened for another reason. I have spent 16 years of my professional career as a professor. I know what academic freedom means and what it doesn't. I also know what academic responsibility means. As an active member of the board of directors of the National Association of Scholars, I also know what certifying boards of education look for when the accrediting process begins. Nothing would please me more than to have this case resolved without any public fanfare. I await your reply.

Sincerely,  
William A. Donohue, Ph.D.  
President

cc: Fr. Jones; Patrick Foye, General Counsel; Steve Balch, president, National Association of Scholars.

Ten days after this letter was sent, Dr. Donohue received a letter from the vice president of the institution stating that Rev. Doe's comments "were inappropriate," and that he has received "disciplinary counseling." It was also said that Rev. Doe "regrets the incident and is aware of the serious consequences of similar future behavior." In addition, Ms. Fox "has agreed to include reviews of Fr. Jones' performance at St. Anselm's Hospital and to present a course evaluation which is honest and mutually agreed between the CPE program and Fr. Jones." The league is satisfied with this response and considers the case closed.