

LEAGUE THREATENS ACTION AGAINST SCHOOL DISTRICT

The Catholic League has threatened to take action against a school district in Northwestern Pennsylvania. After learning that students were barred from creating artwork that depicted a nativity scene, Dr. Donohue sent the following letter to the offending party.

December 13, 1996

Ms. Alice Niebauer
President, Millcreek Township School District
Education Center
3740 W. 26th Street
Millcreek, PA 16506

Dear Ms. Niebauer:

It has been brought to my attention that art teachers in your district have been instructed not to allow nativity scenes in this year's Christmas card contest. This is illegal.

Enclosed you will find the text of a memo that President Clinton sent to Attorney General Janet Reno and Secretary of Education Richard Riley last summer on the subject of religious expression in the schools. Maintaining that "our courts have reaffirmed" that "nothing in the First Amendment converts our public schools into religion-free zones or requires all religious expression to be left behind at the schoolhouse door," President Clinton went on to stress that "Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions."

The district's use of the term "Holiday Card Contest," as

opposed to "Christmas Card Contest," is legal. However, it would not be illegal to use "Christmas Card Contest." I say this because the Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of a federal law that recognizes Christmas as a national holiday; indeed the Congress itself calls December 25 "Christmas" (see *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 675, 680 in 1984).

There are several courses of action that are available to the Catholic League regarding the illegal behavior of your school district. In the interest of fairness, however, this matter can be dropped quickly if you agree to take steps that will rectify this problem in the future. Please let me know what your decision is.

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