

NEWSWEEK Reports on League Transit Ads

The September 26th edition of *Newsweek* magazine included coverage of the Catholic League's transit ads. The article featured a photo of the League's first anti-condom ad, "Want to Know a Dirty Little Secret?" It stated that the League was "reborn after years of near bankruptcy" and that it was conducting anti-condom ads in Boston, New York and Washington. The piece also included quotes from League president William Donohue.

There is no question that the League's ads have hit their mark. In New York, both the first ad and the second one, "Back to School," ignited a much needed public debate on the wisdom of contemporary sex education measures. It is obvious to everyone that unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases are a problem. What is at issue is what to do about the problem. The fashionable approach is to throw condoms at kids and offer instructional advice.

We think that strategy is worse than a failure – it actually contributes to the problem by sending the wrong message.

Even if condoms "worked," there is the larger issue of parental rights. Bureaucrats, listening to the recommendations of the sex education industry, have been too quick to eclipse the rights of parents. By initiating programs that leave parents out of the loop of decision-making, school administrators have trespassed on the rights of those parents who, for religious reasons, object to a thoroughly secularized approach to sex education.

There is not likely to be much progress in this area until educators understand that a class on sexuality is not the same as a class in math or geography. Classes that have moral

content require a level of parental and community input that classes devoid of morality do not. Acknowledgment of such is long overdue.

In Boston, the League's second ad was retitled "Values 101," though it carried the same argument as the one in New York: we tell kids to abstain from smoking, drinking and drugs, but lack the courage to recommend abstinence from sex. Bostonians who travel the Red, Orange and Blue Lines of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority have been treated to 200 copies of this ad. In the first week following placement of the ad, Bostonian Operations Director Joe Doyle was contacted by 24 different media outlets. For the first time in the League's history, all eight television stations in Boston carried news stories on the Catholic League. Even *Ad Week* magazine did a story on the ad.

The ad in Washington, D.C. is different from the other two. Scheduled to be posted on the sides of 50 buses throughout the month of November, this ad will focus attention on the fact that many condoms are defective. It will close with a call for warning labels on condoms, thus putting them on a par with cigarettes and alcohol. Perhaps we will hear what Dr. Joycelyn Elders, the Surgeon General, has to say about the League's idea. Already a voice for misguided policies, it is time for the nation to take a close-up look at Dr. Elders.

Given the strong reaction that the League has received from its transit ads, it is a sure thing that more public service ads will be forthcoming. But the League will not be tied to the condom debate: future ads will tap some of the church-state controversies that have troubled the nation. There are many venues available, at varying costs, and the League will explore as many as it can afford. This is our way of joining the culture war and making certain that Catholic rights are not trespassed on by those who want to sanitize society from religious influence.