

# NJ COURT UPHOLDS CHURCH AUTONOMY

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a ruling granted on August 14 that affirms Church autonomy:

A few months ago, the parents of two female students enrolled in St. Theresa's School in Kenilworth, New Jersey sought to force the school to reinstate their children after they were denied admission to the school this fall. They lost in Superior Court yesterday, as well they should have.

Judge Donald A. Kessler read his decision for three hours from the bench, so chock full of detail was this bizarre lawsuit.

It all began last December when the girls' father, Scott Phillips, filed a lawsuit to get his daughter, Sydney, on the boys basketball team after the season for the girls was cancelled. He succeeded in arranging for her to play in the last game of the boys team in February.

Two months later, the school said the girls were not welcome to return for the next school year. That's when Phillips sued the school, and the Archdiocese of Newark, seeking to force the school to reverse its decision.

"The court does not have the authority to meddle in this decision," said Judge Kessler. The judge was not sparing of the parents, noting how they went public with their complaint, causing undue commotion in the community. To be specific, he cited threatening letters sent by the girls' mother, Theresa Mullen.

Judge Kessler noted that the parents have a record of lodging complaints whenever they don't get their way. In 2016, when the older son of the parents was not named the eighth grade valedictorian, both parents sounded off. Scott Phillips was so

enraged that he called the female principal a “son of a b\*\*\*\*.” The archdiocese intervened to help restore order, but to no avail—the parents remained publicly indignant.

The issue of Church autonomy is fast becoming one of the most contentious matters in the nation. Separation of church and state obviously doesn’t mean much to those who advocate state control of Catholic institutions, but if the Church cannot decide its own internal strictures, it is no longer Catholic. That is exactly what the activists want, which is why they must be fought at every turn.

This also goes to show how vacuous the mantra of diversity is. Those who truly believe in pluralism do not seek to access the heavy hand of the state to force sectarian institutions to march to the beat of its secular drum.