

OREGON EDUCATION OFFICE SUBJECT TO FEDERAL PROBE

The failure of the Oregon Superintendent of Public Instruction, Norma Paulus, to initiate a review of a potential violation of church and state matter may result in a federal investigation of her office. The issue revolves around four women and one man from the staff of Tillamook High School who dressed as nuns and priests at a Halloween celebration. The "nuns" wore huge rosary beads around their neck while pointing large rulers at a student who crouched before them.

Repeated attempts by the Catholic League to get the Office of Public Instruction to investigate this incident failed to trigger any interest, and that is why the league approached the United States Department of Education and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission asking for a probe.

In his letter to both offices, William Donohue said: "My position is quite elementary: if it is a violation of separation of church and state for nuns and priests to work in public schools wearing religious garb, adorned with religious artifacts, then surely it must be unconstitutional to allow public employees who are not nuns and priests to do likewise. To suggest otherwise would be to give permission to mock religion with public funds while denying the promotion of it."

Donohue expanded on his letter with a statement to the media:

"Most of what the Catholic League deals with involves instances of serious, flagrant Catholic bashing. The Oregon matter does not rise to this level, but it nonetheless presents an interesting question: can the state rightly bar real nuns and priests, who wear traditional religious clothing, from working in a public school, while turning a blind eye to school staff who dress up in identical fashion

only to ridicule Catholic religious and clergy? It is time the hypocrites and smart alecks felt the weight of federal mandates on separation of church and state the way genuine nuns and priests have for a very long time."