

SANTA FE CHURCHES DID NOT VIOLATE IRS RULES

Americans United for Separation of Church and State has asked the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to investigate the Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe for violating IRS rules governing electioneering by churches.

Americans United charges that Archbishop Michael Sheehan violated the tax-exempt status of the Church when he directed Catholic parishes to send a flier detailing how candidates in the New Mexico gubernatorial race voted on abortion. The flier, prepared by the Right to Life Committee of New Mexico, listed Republican candidate John Sanchez as pro-life and Democratic challenger Bill Richardson as pro-abortion.

In one of the parishes, Holy Child in Tijeras, a secretary typed in an additional few sentences saying that Richardson's voting record "shows a lack of respect for human life," thus indicating that "he would not serve the people of New Mexico on the life issues any better than he did as a congressman." Americans United is pressing the case as being analogous to the Pierce Creek case in 1995 which resulted in a forfeiture of the church's tax exempt status.

However, it's worth noting that the reason the Church of Pierce Creek in upstate New York lost in 1995 was because a) it was the voice of the institution and b) it flagrantly violated the law by running newspaper ads against presidential candidate Bill Clinton in 1992. In the Santa Fe case, Rev. Bennett J. Voorhies, chancellor of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, issued a flier on September 27 providing voting information on the candidates. Not only was it totally legal, he specifically warned pastors against endorsing any candidate for public office. The fact that a secretary in one of the 92 parishes added two unauthorized lines hardly makes this case

analogous to Pierce Creek.

We find it interesting that candidate Bill Richardson, who claimed victim status, literally campaigned in Mesa Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque on October 3. Not surprisingly, Americans United had absolutely nothing to say about this blatant abuse of the tax laws.