

# SCRANTON-AREA CATHOLIC SCHOOL DRAWS BUSY-BODIES

On April 17, Auxiliary Bishop John Dougherty of the Diocese of Scranton spoke at Bishop O'Reilly High School. During his talk, Bishop Dougherty was greeted with disrespect by members of the junior class. School administrators and faculty overwhelmingly decided that all juniors would be barred from the May 15<sup>th</sup> junior/senior prom; the junior class has a record of misbehavior, stemming from its freshman year. Most seniors, including the senior class president, supported the school's action against the juniors.

What makes this incident a news story is the reaction to it by outsiders. An area radio show, "Hot 97" (WBHT, 97.1), announced that it would host a free prom for the juniors; a local businessman promised to donate space for the prom; music and flowers were extended by other businessmen; and a dentist offered free check-ups for the juniors. The radio show also welcomed on-air calls by those opposed to the school's decision.

When news of the community reaction reached the Catholic League, we immediately contacted the media with our position. Here it is:

"If school officials at a Catholic high school were to publicly challenge the workplace decisions of local media and business operations, they would be summarily denounced in the press for sticking their nose in where they do not belong. Why there hasn't been an outcry of public sentiment against the Bishop O'Reilly busy-bodies is itself worthy of investigative reporting.

"The lesson that the busy-bodies are selling is that bad conduct ought to be rewarded and that Catholic schools should

forfeit their autonomous status. If they actually had an opportunity to meet Bishop Dougherty, they would no doubt agree with the Catholic League that he is one of the finest bishops in the nation, as is his superior, Bishop Timlin. We will watch this closely and take whatever steps are necessary to defend Bishop O'Reilly."

The good news is that public pressure was brought to bear, resulting in a change of heart. The owner of the establishment that promised to host the alternative prom went on the radio with Bishop Timlin apologizing for his initial reaction. The radio station changed its plans, deciding instead to throw a prom for all area high school students who could demonstrate a "B" average or better. Most of the other busy-bodies also backed away, with the exception of the dentist. You can write to Dr. Dale Wilkie at Back Mountain Shopping Center, Shavertown, PA 18708.

The Catholic League is proud of the work of the Diocese of Scranton and was only too happy to be of assistance.