

# SEX SURVEY BY KANSAS CITY STAR BACKFIRES

When the Catholic League learned that the *Kansas City Star* commenced a sex survey of Roman Catholic priests, it immediately decided to follow suit by issuing its own survey of the newspaper's staff.

On October 15, Mark Zieman, editor and vice president of the *Kansas City Star*, sent a letter to Roman Catholic priests, all of whom were randomly selected from the 1999 Kenedy Official Catholic Directory, explaining the nature of the confidential survey; the survey only addressed HIV and AIDS. Our survey, personally addressed to each staff person, was sent to managing editor Steve Shirk for distribution.

"We have come to understand that the disease also had a devastating impact on groups whose members are unable to speak up about the difficulties they have endured," wrote Zieman. On November 4, William Donohue issued the following news release explaining the Catholic League's interest in exploring the sex lives of Zieman's staff:

"I knew my doctorate in sociology would come in handy in this job some day, and today certainly is that day. Being journalists, the reporters and editors at the *Kansas City Star* know nothing about objectivity, and that is why no control group was used in their survey. We have provided one by drawing on the journalists who work at the newspaper; this is also indicative of our commitment to inclusiveness.

"The language we used is almost identical to the newspaper's survey. But there were some changes. For example, instead of asking, 'Do you know priests with HIV or AIDS?', we asked, 'Do you know any journalist who doesn't have HIV or AIDS?' And so on. Our objective was also stated somewhat differently: 'Our

objective is to undermine your efforts at Peeping-Tom journalism. By getting our survey out first, we hope to submarine your newspaper's voyeuristic invasion of the privacy of Roman Catholic priests.' Alas, we hope the newspaper appreciates our inquiry."

Donohue appeared on the CBS TV affiliate in Kansas City making the point that the *Kansas City Star* was guilty of "Peeping Tom journalism." Donohue cited the newspaper's closing questions in its survey as proof that an agenda was at work: those questions asked priests whether the Church should change its teachings on homosexuality and celibacy.