

SNAP IMPLODES

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The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) has been sued before, and while it has been hurt by those filings, the latest one suggests the end is near. It can't come too soon.

The Catholic League has been tracking SNAP for years. From news releases to radio and TV interviews, we have kept the media abreast of just how corrupt the outfit is. We've sent people undercover to attend its public conferences; we've taken out ads in major newspapers; we've issued several lengthy reports; we've fielded complaints from its clients; and we've consulted with bishops and others. SNAP is a fraud.

The lawsuit by a former employee, Gretchen Rachel Hammond, registers several serious accusations against SNAP, all of which are supported by the Catholic League's own investigations of the group. The two together—an eyewitness account and our research—wholly discredit its reputation and completely disarm its supporters, namely, those in the mainstream media.

Hammond has sued David Clohessy, the executive director, Barbara Blaine, founder and president, and outreach director Barbara Dorris; the case is before the Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois. Hammond, a transgender person, worked for SNAP as its director of development between mid-2011 and early 2013. In that capacity, Hammond learned the truth about SNAP, and has now unloaded with the details.

Not surprisingly, after confronting SNAP officials about its ethically offensive and legally suspect work, Hammond was subject to retaliatory action. Consequently, the plaintiff suffered from stress and depression, resulting in health problems. Hammond is suing for a loss of wages as well. The

lawsuit closes with a grave indictment: "SNAP acted willfully with actual malice, including a wanton disregard for the rights of others such that an award of punitive damages is appropriate."

Hammond uncovered a whole lot, all of which will be discussed. Most seriously, the lawsuit says that "SNAP routinely accepts financial kickbacks from attorneys in the form of 'donations,'" and in return SNAP "refers survivors as potential clients to attorneys, who then file lawsuits on behalf of the survivors against the Catholic Church. These cases often settle to the financial benefit of the attorneys and, at times, to the financial health of SNAP, which has received direct payments from survivors' settlements."

Anti-Catholicism Drives SNAP

Before addressing the legal issues involved, it is important to understand what makes SNAP tick. Hammond learned first-hand what the Catholic League has been saying for decades: SNAP is driven by a pathological hatred of the Catholic Church, not a concern for the welfare of victims.

"While SNAP claims that it is motivated by the interests of survivors, in fact," the lawsuit says, "SNAP is motivated largely by the personal animus of its directors and officers against the Catholic Church."

For example, Clohessy recommended that an alleged victim pursue a claim against the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, saying that every nickel it doesn't have is money that can't be spent on "defense lawyers, PR staff, gay-bashing, women-hating, contraceptive-battling, etc." He then offered to refer the person to one of his lawyer friends.

The Catholic League is in an even better position than Hammond to identify SNAP's hatred of the Catholic Church.

On July 8-10, 2011 SNAP held a national conference, open to

the public, near the airport in Washington, D.C. There were approximately 110-130 people in attendance, all white, mostly female, aged 40-75 (mostly seniors or near seniors). They came from only a few states.

We know this, and much more, because I paid for two persons to attend the conference and report back. I subsequently published the findings online in a report, "SNAP EXPOSED: *Unmasking the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.*" Copies were sent to all the bishops.

Here is how one of our confederates summed up his experience. "The recurring theme of the conference was the evil nature of the Catholic Church. The word 'evil' was used repeatedly to describe 'the institution.' There was no presumption of innocence: accused priests were spoken of as if they were guilty, and this was true of all the speakers, including the attorneys."

It was no surprise that Jeffrey Anderson was one of the speakers. No one has ripped off the Catholic Church more than this diminutive lawyer from Minnesota. A former hippie and recovering alcoholic, in one settlement alone he netted half a billion dollars. He once described himself as a "dedicated atheist." His goal, he plainly admits, is to "sue the s*** out of them [the Catholic Church]." His hatred runs deep: He has sued the Vatican on several occasions, trying to hold the pope responsible for priestly misconduct from Boston to Bombay. He has never won.

Father Thomas Doyle, a Dominican, is another recovering alcoholic who has big problems with the Catholic Church. He blasted the Church for promoting "fear, power, and guilt," saying that Constantine, not Jesus Christ, founded the Church.

Another speaker, Terence McKiernan, founder and president of BishopAccountability, told the small gathering of Catholic haters that he would like to "stick it to" New York Archbishop

Timothy Dolan. He also accused him of “keeping the lid on 55 names” of predator priests. On several occasions, I personally asked McKiernan to provide me with his list of names, but he never responds. It’s a lie, and he knows it.

Richard Sipe, a former Benedictine monk, told the seniors, “The Church is corrupt,” and proceeded to make many unsupported accusations. He knew no one would challenge him because they all came to hear horror stories.

It would be a serious mistake to assume that this is just venting, idle banter coming from some malcontents. No, this is the mindset that drives SNAP to plunder the rights of priests. Take SNAP president Barbara Blaine. She has justified raids made by Belgian police on Catholic churches, and is adamant in her conviction, expressed at the conference, that while accused priests may have a legal right to countersue, they have no moral right to do so.

Clohessy was once asked about the rights of priests, and when pressed about what he means by pursuing “credibly accused” priests, he could not provide a clear answer, saying only that “there’s all kinds of criteria” determining what that means. In practice, SNAP makes no distinction between an accusation and one that has been substantiated.

The contempt that SNAP has for the rights of priests is bad enough, but it pales in significance compared to its own conspiratorial savaging of innocent priests. Take the case of Father Joseph Jiang. SNAP accused him of sexually abusing minors.

SNAP said it knew who the victims were, but when pressed it could not name a single person. When ordered by a federal court to provide evidence, it refused to do so, resulting in sanctions. This was one reason why U.S. District Court Judge Carol E. Jackson accused SNAP of defaming Father Jiang. The Hammond lawsuit was right to seize on the judge’s ruling.

The court declared that “it has been established that the SNAP defendants conspired with one another and others to obtain plaintiff’s conviction on sexual abuse charges and that they entered into this conspiracy due to discriminatory animus against plaintiff based on his religion, religious vocation, race and national origin.” Moreover, the court ruled that “the SNAP defendants’ public statements about plaintiff were false and that they did not conduct any inquiry into the truth or falsity of these public statements, but instead made these statements negligently and with reckless disregard for the truth.”

That’s quite an indictment. SNAP officials conspired to make false charges against an innocent priest and did so because they hate the Catholic Church.

What makes this even more sickening is the fact that when SNAP learns of real sexual abuse, it does nothing about it. To be specific, David Clohessy is quick to condemn bishops for not reporting suspected priests, yet he never called the cops in the 1990s on his priest brother, Kevin, after learning that he abused a minor.

Kickbacks

Hammond’s lawsuit lists one “donation” after another being made by plaintiff attorneys to SNAP. These SNAP-greasing lawyers make up the lion’s share of funds collected by Clohessy and company in any given year. For example, in 2008, “a Minnesota lawyer” contributed 55 percent—\$414,140—of SNAP’s total donations for the year; three years later he contributed over 40 percent of total revenue. The lawyers, of course, love to write SNAP a check because that’s how they get many of their clients.

SNAP is so thoroughly corrupt that it has even laundered money to itself via dummy organizations. “Tellingly, at one time during 2011 and 2012,” the lawsuit says, “SNAP even concocted

a scheme to have attorneys make donations to a front foundation, styled the 'Minnesota Center for Philanthropy,' and then have the Minnesota Center for Philanthropy make a grant to SNAP in order to provide a subterfuge for, and to otherwise conceal, the plaintiff's attorneys' kickbacks to SNAP."

Keep in mind that this is just what we know from the short time Hammond was working there. God only knows how many other rip-off schemes SNAP has been involved in over the years.

When Clohessy was deposed in 2012, in a case involving a priest in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, he was asked to disclose his source of funding. He refused. When asked specifically about monies SNAP receives from lawyers, he once again refused to answer. What really set him off was the question, "Does SNAP have any agreements with attorneys regarding referral of victims to those attorneys?" He never answered the question, saying only that he was "offended" by it.

At the 2011 SNAP conference, Anderson shamelessly conducted a fundraising appeal on the spot, matching dollar for dollar any donation made by an attendee. But he made it clear he would not match a \$10,000 donation by fellow attorney Jeffrey Herman. All total, \$30,000 was raised. So if Herman gave \$10,000, and Anderson matched all donations save for Herman's contribution, that means the attendees dished out \$10,000. In other words, two steeple-chasing attorneys accounted for two-thirds of all the money raised. Without their input, SNAP would have folded years ago.

Corruption Abounds

SNAP's unseemly relationship with lawyers is not confined to funding. For example, according to the lawsuit, it "regularly communicates with attorneys about their lawsuits on behalf of survivors, receiving drafts of pleadings and other privileged

information. The attorneys and SNAP work together in developing the legal theories and strategies of survivors' lawsuits." It's what they do with this information that matters most. "Attorneys and SNAP base their strategy not on the best interests of the survivor, but on what will generate the most publicity and fundraising opportunities for SNAP." Hammond's account raises serious ethical and legal questions about the way SNAP operates. Attorneys would give Clohessy, Blaine, and Dorris "drafts of complaints and other pleadings prior to filing, along with other privileged information," and then they would "use those drafts to generate sensational press releases on the survivors' lawsuits." Not surprisingly, they would then issue "press releases to media outlets and schedule a press conference on the day a survivors' lawsuit was filed."

What the lawsuit does not say is how this game is played to the disadvantage of the diocese being sued. For instance, after Clohessy completes his press conference speaking about a leaked lawsuit, the media ask the local bishop and his attorneys to comment. Of course, they cannot say anything about a lawsuit they have not seen. This is exactly the point: the Church is made to look bad.

Hammond's account is further validated by considering what Clohessy said under oath when deposed in 2012. He was asked about a lawsuit that was filed at 2:44 p.m. on October 20, 2011. How could he have had this information before it was filed in court? He used it as the basis of a press conference, blindsiding the Church in the process. Clohessy refused to answer the question.

In another case, a lawsuit had a file stamp of November 8, 2011 at 1:28 p.m. Again, Clohessy was able to post information about this before it was filed with the court. When asked to explain himself, he refused. He is a master of deceit.

Hammond shows how SNAP officials were more concerned about

raking in the dough than in serving the interests of their clients. The lawsuit cites an email exchange between SNAP officials discussing a subpoena that was issued to them. The contents reveal much about their character.

One of them asked if they should mention the subpoena in their newsletter. It “may prompt more donations,” the missive said, even though “on the other hand, it’ll also upset more survivors....” Blaine’s answer was vintage SNAP: “My initial response is that we err on the side of using it to raise money.”

There it is in black and white: in a conflict between obtaining money and protecting survivors, take the cash and run. One of Blaine’s colleagues agreed. What came next is priceless. An unidentified employee chimed in, cautioning everyone to be careful “what we put in e-mails, ok?” Too late for that.

The lawsuit also shows how Clohessy relies on attorneys to intimidate his critics. When a Kansas City blogger raised serious questions about the way lawyers grease SNAP, and how SNAP officials ask their clients to share some of the money they’ve won in a lawsuit, Clohessy asked an attorney involved in the case to reply. He said that if the writer were to get a letter from a lawyer, out of “fear” he may become “more temperate in his comments in the future.” In other words, let’s see if we can silence the critic by intimidating him.

What does SNAP do with its money? The officials know how to have a good time. When traveling to The Hague in 2011 to file a lawsuit against Pope Benedict in the International Criminal Court (it went nowhere), they “used the funds raised by Plaintiff to pay for lavish hotels and other extravagant travel expenses for its leadership.” Not only that, but “SNAP also uses funds meant to assist survivors on its own legal troubles.”

SNAP is not an organization the way the Catholic League is. We have a staff that goes to work Monday thru Friday, reporting to our office in New York City. Not SNAP. When Clohessy was deposed, he testified that SNAP has a business address in Chicago. Who works there is a mystery. He didn't even know the zip code. He works out of his home, but it is not near the Chicago office. It's in the St. Louis area.

What does Clohessy do for a living? He said he fields phone calls from strangers who "share their pain" with him. So what does he do about their pain? "I console them and I may be on the phone with them for an hour." He said he doesn't charge a fee. So generous of him.

Declaring one's home a place of business raises legal questions. Clohessy was asked whether "at your house do you have an occupational license or a business license to do business out of your house?" He simply said, "No."

Under oath, Clohessy was asked if SNAP gives a portion of its funds to charity, as required by law. He replied, "I'm not aware of that." So what does SNAP do with its money? It was revealed that in 2007 it spent a total of \$593 on "survivor support." That was it. The following year it spent \$92,000 on travel. This is quite a racket.

How SNAP Exploits Survivors

On the first page of Hammond's lawsuit, it says "SNAP does not focus on protecting or helping survivors—it exploits them."

SNAP, the lawsuit says, "callously disregards the real interests of survivors, using them instead as props and tools in furtherance of SNAP's own commercial fundraising goals. Instead of recommending that survivors pursue what is in their best personal, emotional, and financial interests, SNAP pressures survivors to pursue costly and stressful litigation against the Catholic Church, all in order to further SNAP's own publicity and fundraising interests."

The media would have us believe that SNAP is a caring, survivor outreach organization in pursuit of justice. It is anything but.

If SNAP really cared about the victims of sexual abuse, it would employ professional counselors to deal with them. But as the lawsuit says, it “did not have a single grief counselor or rape counselor on its payroll.” Moreover, it “never reached out to, or communicated with, grief counselors or rape counselors for the purpose of providing counseling to survivors through SNAP’s network.”

Worse, SNAP “would even ignore survivors who reached out to them.” When Dorris was told about phone calls from aggrieved parties—persons who shared their traumatic experiences—she told Hammond “to simply not answer phone calls from survivors seeking assistance and counseling.” In other words, just blow them off.

There is one Louisiana psychiatrist who did work for SNAP, Dr. Steve Taylor, but in 2011 he was sentenced to prison. His offense? Possession of child pornography. SNAP defended him! In fact, Blaine wrote to the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners pleading with them to cut Taylor some slack. And they have the nerve to pretend that they care about child sexual abuse.

SNAP claims to be a rape crisis center, but it is a lie. The lawsuit correctly references Clohessy’s deposition, citing how the court labeled as “meritless” SNAP’s assertion that it is a rape crisis center.

Clohessy told the court that he didn’t have to comply with a request for internal documents, nor did he have to answer any questions. He cited Missouri law which protects the confidentiality of rape crisis centers. But when asked, point blank, “Did you identify yourself as a rape crisis center?”, he said, “I don’t know.” At a later point, he admitted, “I

don't know under the Missouri statutes exactly what constitutes a rape crisis center."

Clohessy was asked about his training as a rape crisis center counselor. He admitted that he had no formal education or training in that area. In fact, he is not a licensed counselor, and even admitted he has never taken formal classes in counseling sexual abuse victims. [He has a bachelor's degree in philosophy and political science.] Yet his lack of expertise did not stop him from falsely presenting himself as a counselor. In fact, no one at SNAP has ever been a licensed counselor.

When Clohessy was asked where his "counseling" sessions took place, he said, "We meet people wherever they want to meet, in Starbucks, at, you know—wherever people feel comfortable, that's where we meet." What do they do? He admitted that "the overwhelming bulk of our work is talking to, listening to, supporting sex abuse victims." He did not say who paid for the coffee in these "clinical" settings.

How SNAP Exploits the Media

The lawsuit charges that SNAP "manipulates and exploits media publicity surrounding survivors' lawsuits against the church to raise its own publicity and drive fundraising efforts." In a case involving Father Michael Tierney, et al., the trial judge issued a gag order after SNAP made statements that "seriously jeopardize [the priest's] ability to receive a fair trial in this case." That gag order was then violated, leading to a very telling exchange.

Clohessy was put on the spot. "Has SNAP to your knowledge ever issued a press release that contained false information?" He didn't blink. "Sure."

Not only does SNAP lie to the media, it has a blueprint for doing so. At the conference, Clohessy gave some tips on how to sucker the media and stick it to the Church. Attendees were

instructed that the best way to get the media's attention is to hold press conferences outside a chancery. That way when the event is over, reporters can quickly seek an interview with some diocesan PR person.

What really works, the gathering was told, is to play on the emotions of reporters. "Display holy childhood photos!" What if no photos are available? "If you don't have compelling holy childhood photos," Clohessy said, "we can provide you with photos of other kids that can be held up for the camera." It doesn't matter whose kids are in the photo—what counts is that the media be seduced.

Clohessy also instructed attorneys to conduct interviews in front of the parish where the priest was assigned. Why? This is a good way to get clients and entice whistleblowers to come forward when they see the interview on TV.

It is important, Clohessy said, to use "feeling words." He offered some suggestions. "I was scared. I was suicidal." He counseled that it is better to come across as sad, not mad; doing so facilitates making an emotional connection with the audience. It was also critical to use the word "kids" as often as possible. That pulls at everyone's heart strings.

Conclusion

What we know about SNAP, and what is alleged, is startling.

- It accepts kickbacks from attorneys
- It is motivated by a pathological hatred of the Catholic Church
- It has no respect for the rights of accused priests
- It lies about priests
- It lies to survivors
- It lies to judges
- It lies to the media
- It seeks to intimidate and silence its critics
- It blindsides diocesan officials with leaked lawsuits

- It abuses donations
- It exploits survivors by offering unlicensed counseling services
- It spends practically nothing on servicing survivors
- It manipulates the media by staging events
- It retaliates against employees who question its operations

In short, SNAP officials function as borderline gangsters out to destroy innocent persons. It is motivated by hate and exploits the very people it claims to serve. Justice demands that it be shut down by the authorities before it does any more harm.