

# USCCB      FOE      SLAMS      USCCB EMPLOYEE

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on John Gehring's attack on Judy Keane:

Judy Keane is the director of public affairs at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). She was put on leave for a week after she tweeted some pro-Trump statements; she noted in her tweets that the opinions expressed were her own. This would be of no interest to the Catholic League were it not for the attack on her by John Gehring. [By the way, I have never met or corresponded with Keane.]

Gehring notes that some of Keane's positions, such as her advocacy of a wall to stop people from illegally crashing our borders, is at odds with the position of the USCCB. That may be but that is not Gehring's business.

Gehring once worked at the USCCB in a junior position, and he now heads a militant secularist organization—it is really nothing but a letterhead—Faith in Public Life, funded by George Soros, an atheist billionaire and notorious anti-Catholic.

In 2012, I received a tip from a journalist that Gehring was trying to sabotage the bishops by briefing reporters on the kinds of questions they should ask: He wanted the reporters to nail the bishops to the wall. This was his way of undermining the bishops' Fortnight for Freedom event, an ongoing religious liberty project. Gehring [advised](#) the reporters not to buy the argument that religious liberty was under attack. He was [blasted](#) by the USCCB for doing so. To this day, I am proud of making this tip public.

Since that time Gehring has been involved in the same kinds of anti-religious liberty campaigns that his Soros-funded dummy

Catholic organizations have been. In 2016, it was revealed, via the Wikileaks emails, that Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good and Catholics United were set up by Hillary Clinton operative John Podesta to create a “revolution” in the Catholic Church. Gehring’s efforts continue to serve that cause today.

Gehring has no moral leg to stand on by criticizing Judy Keane. His hatred of the USCCB, as well as Church teachings on moral issues—to say nothing of his alliance with George Soros—automatically disqualifies him.

Contact: [jgehring@faithinpubliclife.org](mailto:jgehring@faithinpubliclife.org)

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## **INDIANAPOLIS GAY TEACHER SEEKS REVENGE**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on an Indianapolis homosexual teacher who is suing the archdiocese:

Joshua Payne-Elliott is a homosexual activist who taught at Cathedral High School in Indianapolis. He was fired once it was discovered that he married his boyfriend. He is now seeking revenge in the courts.

His lawyer makes two arguments, both of which are false.

First, his suit maintains that the Archdiocese of Indianapolis “illegally interfered with his contractual and employment relationship with Cathedral High School, causing Cathedral to terminate him on June 23, 2019.”

In fact, the teacher voluntarily signed a contract with the school, pledging to uphold Catholic teachings. One of those

teachings rejects a marriage between two men or two women, or between multiple partners. Moreover, the school is not independent of the archdiocese—it is under the jurisdiction of Indianapolis Archbishop Charles Thompson. He contends, quite rightfully, that “all teachers, school leaders and guidance counselors are ministers and witnesses of the faith, who are expected to uphold the teachings of the Church in their daily lives, both in and out of school.”

Second, the lawsuit claims that the archdiocese “discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation and retaliated against him for opposing sexual orientation discrimination.”

In fact, *no one has ever been fired from a Catholic school because he is a homosexual*. This is a red herring. The teacher was fired because he *publicly* flaunted his *marriage* to another man, not because he happened to be attracted to other men.

Payne-Elliott’s attorney said, “We hope that this case will put a stop to the targeting of LGBTQ employees and their families.” In fact, Catholic schools do not “target” homosexuals any more than they “target” heterosexuals.

According to the attorney’s logic, the Catholic Church must be anti-straight since most Catholic teachers who have been fired have obviously been heterosexual. Catholic teachers are fired because they violate their contract, just like any other workplace employee, not because of their sexual proclivities.

This case is not an isolated event. Homosexual activists are busy in many Catholic venues trying to get the courts to vitiate the First Amendment rights of the Catholic Church. For justice to prevail, these anti-civil liberties activists must be defeated.

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# CALIFORNIA CONFESSIONAL BILL WITHDRAWN

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the final outcome of the California confessional bill:

The seal of confession is safe in California. The bill to bust it has been pulled.

Yesterday, on the eve of a scheduled hearing on SB 360, California State Sen. Jerry Hill withdrew his bill; it would have broken the seal of the confessional in some instances. He pulled his legislation once he realized he didn't have enough votes to make it out of the Assembly Public Safety Committee.

The effort to stop the bill was led by Los Angeles Archbishop José Gomez. The Catholic League played an ancillary role, mobilizing tens of thousands of Catholics: we provided them with email contacts that they used effectively. We are proud of Archbishop Gomez and all of those Catholics and non-Catholics who supported him.

In making the case against SB 360, we cited three major concerns: the damage it would do to religious liberty; the dubious predicate of the bill; and its unenforceability.

The idea of having the government police the details of a Catholic sacrament is draconian. Furthermore, it would forever place in jeopardy the religious liberty protections afforded by the First Amendment. It would also do irreparable damage to the priest-penitent relationship, compromising, as it would, the confidentiality of the confessional.

Sen. Hill said that the bill was necessitated because "the clergy-penitent privilege has been abused on a large scale, resulting in underreported and systemic abuse of thousands of children across multiple denominations and faiths."

On June 12, I wrote to Sen. Hill about his claim. "Could you please provide my office with documentation to support that claim? I will not be coy: I don't believe you can. But go ahead and prove me wrong." He never answered, and we both know why.

On June 25, I wrote to Assemblyman Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, chairman of the Public Safety Committee in charge of the bill. I asked him to reconsider the legislation. "It is not only the wrong remedy, it is unenforceable as well."

These are just two of our exchanges with lawmakers about this bill.

This is a smashing victory. Many thanks to all of those who contacted these legislators. Without your input—your follow through—there may very well have been a different outcome. We can set the agenda, and provide the email contacts, but only you can make it happen. There is strength in numbers.

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## **HEARING SET FOR CALIFORNIA CONFESSIONAL BILL**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the latest news regarding the California confessional bill:

Over the past several months, the Catholic League has been a vociferous opponent of a bill that would break the seal of the Confessional in California in cases where the sexual abuse of a minor was discussed.

Initially, the priest-penitent privilege was to be gutted altogether, then the bill was amended to apply to two

categories of people: other priests or co-workers of the priest hearing the confession. While this was an improvement, it still allowed the government to police a sacrament of the Catholic Church.

A hearing on this issue is scheduled for July 9th by the Public Safety Committee. Fortunately, leaders in many faith communities are opposing SB 360, which is sponsored by Sen. Jerry Hill. The chairman of this committee, Assemblyman Reginald Byron Jones-Sawyer, is a key player in weighing this seriously flawed legislation. Please contact him and let him know of your opposition.

Contact: [assemblymember.jones-sawyer@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:assemblymember.jones-sawyer@assembly.ca.gov)

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## CONFIDENCE IN CHURCHES DIPS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on a new Gallup poll:

Gallup released a poll on July 8th showing a decline in the public's confidence in the church or organized religion. It found that 36% had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence; 36% had "some"; and 29% said they had "very little" or "none." That was the lowest degree of confidence recorded since 1973. Still, 72% of Americans continue to express confidence in the church or organized religion.

It is not hard to determine the decrease in confidence. The biggest drop occurred in 2002 when the *Boston Globe* published its series on the Catholic clergy sexual abuse scandal. This obviously colored the perception of the public about religious institutions in general.

Ironically, confidence in religious entities was at its highest when the scandal was raging (the lion's share of the abuse took place between 1965 and 1985), but the public knew nothing about it. When it became big news, the stories were mostly about old cases, but the media gave the impression that the scandal was ongoing. It still does, even though it is factually without support.

Not surprisingly, those who have no religious affiliation have the least favorable view of religious institutions, registering a confidence vote of just 8%. It would be fascinating to learn how many of these people, who are disproportionately young, have a great deal of confidence in themselves.

The Gallup poll measured the level of confidence for 15 institutions. The confidence in religious institutions was the sixth highest. The top three were the military, small business, and the police. The presidency was fourth. In last place was the Congress. Also at the bottom were newspapers (12th place) and television news (14th).

Congress has come in last place since 2010. Unlike the dip in confidence in churches, this probably has less to do with media coverage than it does with a sustained sense of exasperation with the institution itself. Lawmakers appear to be more interested in bickering and launching investigations than they do in getting things done and passing meaningful legislation. Health care and immigration are two prime examples.

The lack of confidence in the media (newspapers and TV news) is due to media bias. To be sure, it is not due to biased reporting by the media on itself. No, it is due to the perception that the media have become increasingly politicized, having lost a sense of objectivity. The difference between news reporting and commentary has been blurred, leading to a lack of confidence in the media to

accurately report the news.

Religious institutions have been hurt but their standing is still relatively strong. The real story here is the abysmal record of the media and the Congress: 39% have “very little” or “no” confidence in newspapers; 48% feel that way about TV news; and 52% say that about the Congress.

If there is one takeaway from this survey that has political implications it is this: current perceptions of the media and the Congress are more likely to hurt the Democrats running against President Trump than they are to hurt him. Indeed, he has used the Congressional stalemate to his advantage. And he has certainly benefited from media bias against him, which is palpable, to score points with the electorate.

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## **PA LAWMAKER MERITS CENSURE**

The Catholic League is asking members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to support HR 387, a measure that would censure Rep. Brian Sims for his threats, his misogyny, and his religious bigotry. This represents the second effort on our part to secure justice for the victims of Sims' offenses.

On May 7, the Catholic League contacted every member of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives about this matter. We sought their support for our call to censure Rep. Brian Sims for his bullying and his vicious anti-Catholicism.

We were subsequently told by counsel for the House Ethics Committee that our request must meet the standards outlined in the House Rules and the Legislative Code of Ethics (Act 154 of 1968). That Act deals mostly with conflict of interest



violations. This is a different matter, which is why we are now supporting a resolution by Rep. Jerry Knowles to censure Sims.

What Sims did on May 5 was outrageous. Unprovoked, he approached an elderly Catholic woman who was praying the rosary outside a Planned Parenthood clinic in Philadelphia and started bullying her.

For eight uninterrupted minutes, Sims badgered her, telling her to go pray at home. When she asked him to stop, he followed her around and threatened to make her home address public so that others could harass her.

Two days earlier, Sims tweeted that Planned Parenthood protesters are “racist, classist, bigots.” He apparently has no clue about the origins of this organization. It was founded by Margaret Sanger, a notorious white racist who said it was her goal to “weed out” the “undesirables,” by which she meant African Americans.

Sims also went into a protracted anti-Catholic rant. “How many Catholic churches are you protesting in front of? There are 400 Catholic priests in Pennsylvania indicted for child molestation.” [Wrong. Over a period of 70 years, 301 priests had an *unsubstantiated accusation* made against them. Two were prosecuted.]

On a previous occasion, Sims became equally aggressive by intimidating three pro-life teenage girls. He offered \$100 to anyone who would identify the girls, hoping to have protesters show up at their house to harass them.

To this day, Sims refuses to apologize for any of his behavior. He makes threats and puts innocent persons in danger. Moreover, he always chooses either young females or elderly ladies to bully. To make matters worse, he singles out Catholics, making the most bigoted remarks about their religion.

This man is not fit to be a dog catcher, never mind a sitting member of the Pennsylvania legislature. What more does it take to censure him?

U.S. Senator Al Franken was driven from office after revelations of sexual misconduct. What Sims did was worse. Franken's offenses took place before he was elected to the Senate—Sims committed his offenses while in office. Justice demands that no public official be permitted to get away with such obscene conduct.

This is not simply a Pennsylvania issue—it is a national issue. We implore lawmakers from both parties to act responsibly and censure Rep. Brian Sims.

*Rep. Knowles needs to know of your support. Contact: [jknowles@pahousegop.com](mailto:jknowles@pahousegop.com)*

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## **ATTACKS ON INDIANAPOLIS ARCHBISHOP CONTINUE**

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the ongoing attacks on the Indianapolis archbishop:

Indianapolis Archbishop Charles Thompson continues to draw fire for his decision to speak out against the employment of two teachers who worked at local Catholic schools. His critics have taken the side of two men who publicly claimed to be married to each other in a civil ceremony (one teaches at a diocesan school and the other at a Jesuit school). The Catholic Church does not recognize the validity of such unions.

One of the critics is a writer for the Religion News Service. It is not certain what religious service this news outlet is offering by opposing the religious liberty of the archbishop, nor is it clear why it labels the Church's position "complex." There is nothing complex about affirming over 2,000 years of Church teachings on the institution of marriage.

Nor is there anything complex about enforcing a contract in the workplace. In both instances, one was in a diocesan school and the other was in a Jesuit school, the homosexual teachers voluntarily signed a contract which they subsequently violated. They are not victims.

The Religion News Service writer, Jack Jenkins, is right to note that the U.S. Supreme Court allows religious entities a "ministerial exception" in making employment decisions. This means that they can insist that its employees practice fidelity to the tenets of the Catholic Church. This is exactly what Archbishop Thompson has done.

The article by a young intern at Forbes is similarly flawed. Natalie Sachmechi follows the lead of Jenkins by citing a poll that reveals Catholic support for gay marriage. They have yet to learn that the Catholic Church is not guided by surveys: it is guided by truth. The truth is found in the Scriptures, not in public opinion.

The intern not only wants the Church to follow the polls, she wants it to adopt the position of anti-Catholic organizations. She cites New Ways Ministry, a totally discredited entity that has been exposed as a fraud by the Vatican, and DignityUSA, another outlier group that opposes the Church's teachings on sexuality, as being legitimate Catholic voices. They are no more Catholic than a Buddhist school is.

An op-ed column by Margaret Renkl in the July 2nd edition of the *New York Times* also defends the homosexuals who violated their contract. She goes so far as to say that Archbishop

Thompson's behavior looks "very much like a witch hunt."

Ironically, she is the one opening the door to a witch hunt. She is angry that Thompson chose to go after these men while not going after other teachers who break the house rules. By way of example, she mentions teachers who take birth control pills, as well as those who are divorced and remarried without an annulment. But unlike the public flouting of Church teachings by the homosexuals, the only way the Church could effectively monitor such behaviors is by conducting a witch hunt that probes the private conduct of its employees. Is that what she wants?

Renkl thinks she is on to something by defending the conscience rights of the homosexuals who violated their contract. Nice try. Archbishop Thompson has a conscience, too. Why shouldn't his conscience rights be respected?

The *Catechism* of the Catholic Church says that "Faced with a moral choice, conscience can make either a right judgment in accordance with reason and the divine law or, on the contrary, an erroneous judgment that departs from them." Importantly, it declares that "Ignorance of the Gospel," and "assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience [and] rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching" can also be "the source of errors of judgment in moral conduct."

In other words, not all moral decisions guided by conscience are equal. Some are licit and others are not. Those who assert "a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience," as Renkl does, are not acting in the Catholic tradition. It is also not part of the Catholic tradition to invoke conscience rights as a way to justify their "rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching."

Kudos to Archbishop Thompson for standing fast against these unjust attacks.

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# POPE REAFFIRMS TEACHING ON CONFESSIONAL SEAL

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the pope's statement on the seal of confession:

On July 1, the Vatican released a document on the seal of the confessional that was approved by Pope Francis on June 21. The Holy Father issued a statement of his own on the document. It comes at a time when some civil authorities, such as in California, are seeking to penalize priests for withholding information about the sexual abuse of a minor learned in the confessional.

The Vatican's message to these lawmakers is unmistakable: Under no circumstances will the Catholic Church allow priests to divulge any information about any subject learned in the confessional. "A confessor's defense of the sacramental seal, if necessary, even to the point of shedding blood," the document said, is "obligatory," allowing of no exceptions.

The document, the *Note of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the importance of the internal forum and the inviolability of the sacramental seal*, cites "a worrying negative prejudice" against the Catholic Church that exists in many parts of the world. This prejudice is expressed in the form of public opinion, and is directed at pressuring the Church to change its teachings. The Church's "legal order," the *Note* says, "is expected, at times, to conform to that of the States in which it lives in the name of a supposed correctness and transparency."

California legislators must understand that no state law will ever persuade priests to make public that which is learned in

the confessional. "Any political action of legislative initiative aimed at breaking the inviolability of the confessional seal," the document says, "would be an unacceptable offense against the liberty of the church, which does not receive its legitimacy from individual states, but from God."

Accordingly, the Catholic League will contact every member of the California assembly asking them to reject SB 360; it would be preferable if it were withdrawn. As every honest person must admit, this bill will never meet its objective—the priests are not going to budge.