

# THE LIFELINE FIASCO

Many Catholic League members have called the national headquarters asking for more information regarding our decision to break with LifeLine, the long distance carrier of AmeriVision. What follows should answer any questions left outstanding. But just to set the record straight, please understand that there is another organization that has unfortunately been unfairly confused with LifeLine: it is called Lifeline Systems, Inc. This organization does excellent charitable work and is not to be mistaken for the LifeLine that has earned our wrath.

The memo that follows will explain what happened at the outset of November. But a few things have transpired since that bear mentioning.

First of all, it is not just Catholic Answers that has been found unacceptable to LifeLine, St. Joseph's Radio and Franciscan University of Steubenville—both strong defenders of Catholicism—have also been rejected. Second, in the original rejection letter sent by LifeLine on July 28 to Catholic Answers, it was charged that Karl Keating's organization "exists to defend the Roman Catholic Faith." Yet in the correspondence that LifeLine has sent to those who have inquired about this fiasco, the word Roman mysteriously appears without italics.

Third, I faxed Carl Thompson, LifeLine's vice president, three memos on November 1, the last of which was explicitly labeled, "Latest Fax." Not only did he not respond to this memo, it is not included in the correspondence that LifeLine is faxing to inquiring persons. Indeed, Thompson's last memo to me, which lacked both a date and a title, now appears dated and with the label "Last Fax" on it. This deliberate tampering with the facts is unconscionable.

I know that many Catholics want to work with Evangelicals and are disturbed by what has happened. I, too, am disturbed—at LifeLine. The Catholic League did exactly what it should have done from the very beginning: we spotted anti-Catholicism and we moved against it. Not to have done so would have been to compromise the mission of the Catholic League for some partisan agenda. That is not the way we operate, as Mr. Thompson (and others) are now discovering.

Many have asked what long distance carrier they should join. It should be understood that the Catholic League is not in the business of trying to hijack LifeLine's business so as to serve some other organization. We are simply reporting the facts as they are. There are other carriers out there, some of which are apparently quite good, but we are reluctant to recommend them for fear of being charged with having an ulterior motive. So the best advice we can give is to do some research yourself (e.g. ask Catholic organizations you admire what service they are using) and then make an informed judgment.

To: Interested Parties

From: Bill Donohue

Date: 11-17-95

Re: LifeLine

There is still confusion among Catholics regarding the feud between the Catholic League and LifeLine. Let me explain why we are urging all Catholics to quit LifeLine.

The problem centers on the refusal of LifeLine to allow Catholic Answers the right to participate in its program because, as stated in a July 28 letter to the organization, Catholic Answers "exists to spread and defend the *Roman Catholic Faith*." In the letter, the person who was said to authorize this decision was LifeLine Vice President Carl

Thompson. The person who signed the letter was Marty Dhabolt.

Thompson now denies he authorized this decision. Dhabolt disputes this saying that his boss relayed to him exactly what Thompson wanted in the letter. In any event, Dhabolt has since been fired from LifeLine.

In response to the Catholic League's November 1 news release expressing outrage over this affair, Carl Thompson immediately faxed me a letter saying that Catholic Answers was denied because "we did not, quite frankly, get along very well with those with whom we talked." He said that LifeLine excludes many groups "that we don't feel we can get along with."

In conversations I have had with Dhabolt and Karl Keating, the executive director of Catholic Answers, both have independently said that there were no problems whatsoever between the two groups. Indeed, Dhabolt insists that Catholic Answers was easier to get along with than most groups.

More important, on November 1 Thompson sent a memo to many groups saying that Catholic Answers was denied inclusion because of the "demands and threats of its leadership."

On the same day, I faxed a letter to Thompson that addressed both his letter to me and the public memo. I asked him two questions. First, I wanted clarification on something that was confusing to me. In Thompson's letter to me, he said, in reference to the letter denying Catholic Answers, that "the first paragraph of the letter is accurate." What was confusing to me was that it was precisely the first paragraph of that letter that was alarming: that was the paragraph that stated Catholic Answers was being denied because it "exists to spread and defend the *Roman* Catholic Faith." So why would Thompson a) claim innocence from authorizing the denial of Catholic Answers on these grounds and then b) verify that the paragraph in question was accurate?

My second question to Thompson was the most critical: I asked

him to please explain what he meant when he charged, in his public memo, that Catholic Answers was denied participation in the LifeLine program because of “the demands and threats of its leadership.”

Thompson never directly answered either question. Instead, he said that he never makes public the reason why any charity is denied inclusion in LifeLine because “I do not want to harm anyone, so I stated it would be better not to say.”

My response to Thompson was to wonder why, if he was not interested in doing harm to anyone, would he say in his public memo that Catholic Answers was denied because of the “demands and threats” that they made? And why is it that we still don’t know the nature of those threats? As I said, “I can think of few things more harmful than to allege that someone has made threats against someone else.”

If, in fact, Catholic Answers was denied because it made threats against LifeLine, then it is incumbent on LifeLine to explain the nature of those threats. But if, as Karl Keating says, that there were never any threats in the first place (other than the fact that Keating’s organization educates Catholics against the “sheep stealers” in the Evangelical community), then Keating has been unfairly maligned and deserves an apology.

Speaking of an apology, it should be known that in Thompson’s original letter to me, he said that he would be contacting Catholic Answers to apologize to them and to invite them into the program. But neither has happened.

It is for all these reasons that the Catholic League urges all Catholic subscribers of LifeLine to quit.