

# TWENTY YEARS AS PRESIDENT

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July 1 marked my 20th anniversary as president and CEO of the Catholic League. The vice president, Bernadette Brady, started 18 years ago on the same day. Father Philip Eichner, the chairman of the board of directors, was chosen to lead the board the year before I was hired.

While I may be the face of the Catholic League, we wouldn't have been a success without the steady and inspirational support of Father Eichner, and the scrupulously diligent service of Bernadette. While others have come and gone, we remain, and God willing, we will continue to do so for many years to come. It certainly has been quite a ride.

Father Virgil Blum founded the Catholic League in 1973. It was a tumultuous year: *Roe v. Wade* brought the culture war to new heights, and Watergate tore us apart politically. While abortion was important to Blum, his central issue was school vouchers. Sadly, it remains an issue.

Looking back at the last 20 years, there are any number of events that stand out. In the summer of 1993, a news release I had written criticizing the anti-Catholic remarks of President Bill Clinton's Surgeon General, Dr. Joycelyn Elders, surprisingly won the plaudits of the *Washington Post*. The *New York Post* gave us a big surge that fall when we were featured on the front page: we made a public stink about a disrespectful ad on New York City buses that compared Our Blessed Mother to pop star Madonna.

In the mid-90s, we succeeded in having Barneys, a trendy Madison Avenue clothing store, remove a vulgar nativity scene from its store-front window. We ripped the movie "Priest," sending shock waves through Disney and Miramax; we forced them to move the start date from Good Friday.

We got Calvin Klein to pull a cheesy Times Square ad. In Oregon, we proved victorious in protesting the taping of a priest in the confessional by the local D.A. We also had our first forays in the proverbial Christmas wars.

At the end of the 20th century, we assembled thousands in the streets to protest the ugly play, "Corpus Christi." We also got Catholics into the streets to take on a particularly offensive exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art. We are very proud of the fact that our relentless criticisms of the ABC show, "Nothing Sacred," forced it off the air. Taking on the House Chaplain issue was a wake-up call: we realized how bigoted some of our evangelical Protestant brothers could be; we succeeded in getting the first priest installed in that post.

At the beginning of the new millennium, we were going head-to-head with Marilyn Manson, Howard Stern, Ted Turner, Opie and Anthony (we got them fired, and then made peace with them), Bill Maher, and "South Park." As we hit mid-decade, we were engrossed in a long battle over Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." Importantly, anti-Catholics in the Democratic Party were shoved out of a job after we exposed who they were.

Christopher Hitchens and I had dueled in 2000 in a major debate, but by 2005 we were regularly fighting with each other on TV. We blasted "The Da Vinci Code" in 2006, and got NBC to drop Madonna's "Mock Crucifixion" number from a scheduled concert. With the help of the Thomas More Law Center, we sued San Francisco. In an important victory, we got Wal-Mart to apologize for a stupid anti-Christmas stunt.

After Sen. John Edwards hired an anti-Catholic to join him in his presidential campaign in 2007, we made short order of her. We exposed what a scam the "Jesus Tomb" nonsense was, and we pressured Miller Brewing to stop sponsoring a vile anti-Catholic gay event. Our campaign against the film, "The Golden Compass," hurt box office sales so much that the second and

third films that had been planned about the trilogy were scratched. On the fun side, "South Park" creators made a character of me: I bumped Benedict and became pope (only to be killed by Jesus!).

At the end of the decade, I got Sen. John McCain to drop his association with Pastor John Hagee (the minister and I have since become friends), and was targeted by the IRS for opposing Sen. Barack Obama's pro-abortion policies. We joined the fight against Connecticut lawmakers who sought to take over the Catholic Church, criticized "Angels & Demons," and launched a serious campaign against Penn and Teller.

In the last few years, we beat the Smithsonian and their elite supporters in the artistic community. We successfully confronted SNAP, the *Kansas City Star*, and Jon Stewart. We fought discriminatory legislation at the federal, state and local levels, and stood firmly against attempts to dumb down Christmas.

These are just a few issues and events that come to mind. Also, I've been blessed with many awards from the Catholic community. If I had to pick one that means the most to me, it would be the beautiful statement that Cardinal John O'Connor wrote to me on April 12, 2000; I received his congratulatory letter, nicely framed, at a *Crisis* dinner in Washington, D.C. He died three weeks later.

Looking forward to many more battles. They won't ever defeat us.