

VIRGINIA NAVAL BASE VIOLATES RIGHT OF ASSOCIATION

Captain R.W. Jerome, Commander of Naval Security Group Northwest, has determined that area civilian Catholics, located in Chesapeake, Virginia, can no longer have access to the Northwest Chapel that lies just outside the base; this reverses a decision of more than two decades that accommodated these Catholics. This is not a decision that the Catholic League is protesting, though many others, including both Virginia Senators, are.

What the Catholic League is protesting, however, is the barring of the Knights of Columbus from using this chapel. Commander Jerome says that the Knights (along with a Methodist Men's group and the Boy Scouts) are guilty of discriminating against women and thus cannot use the chapel.

Catholic League president William Donohue announced the league's position today:

"We have written to Commander Jerome and to Secretary of the Navy Richard Danzig expressing our willingness to sue the Navy in the event the Knights of Columbus decides to do so. The operative directive from the Department of Defense bars 'unlawful discrimination,' making plain its willingness to countenance reasonably-grounded distinctions (by way of analogy, the Fourth Amendment bars searches and seizures that are 'unreasonable,' thus allowing for reasonable ones). Moreover, the right of private voluntary groups to determine their own membership strictures is a right that the courts have always protected.

"At stake is freedom of association, a First Amendment right that the federal courts upheld in the case of the Ancient Order of Hibernians against gay activists: in that case,

homosexuals sought to have their own marching unit in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. We expect that if this case reaches the high court, it will also sustain this constitutional right. In the meantime, we will conduct a public relations campaign against the U.S. Navy."