

WITCH HUNT AGAINST PRIESTS IN ERIE, PA

The northwestern Pennsylvania chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) has embarked on an aggressive campaign, posting signs on the front doors of Catholic schools throughout Erie County urging people to come forward with the names of molesting priests. Erie Bishop Donald Trautman labeled the unauthorized campaign as “reprehensible.” He accused those involved of invading private property and of scaring children.

We issued the following statement to the media on this issue:

“The national organization of SNAP has done some important work but the regional chapter in northwestern Pennsylvania is out of control and needs to be checked. The regional group has admitted that it cannot name one priest in Erie County who has been accused of abusing children, but that hasn’t stopped it from setting off the alarms. Given the lack of evidence, it would make as much sense for the Erie branch of SNAP to target all houses of worship and sectarian schools with its inflammatory signs. That it has chosen to focus exclusively on Catholic schools is revealing: this is a witch hunt against Catholic priests.

“It cannot be said too many times that two-thirds of one percent of priests nationwide are currently under investigation for the sexual abuse of a minor. While one priest is too many, it smacks of bigotry to launch the kind of exploitative campaign that has begun in northwestern Pennsylvania: it unnecessarily frightens children and it unfairly stigmatizes priests. We look to the leadership of the national headquarters of SNAP to condemn this tactic for what it is—a media grandstanding event done at the expense of justice to innocent priests.”

It does not speak well for SNAP that its national leaders refused to condemn this behavior. Indeed, they condoned it.