

# WORKPLACE DISCRIMINATION CHECKED IN SAN DIEGO

Thank to the efforts of the league's San Diego chapter president, Carl Horst, the religious rights of a young Hispanic woman have been restored in the workplace. On February 12, Ash Wednesday, the woman had the ashes on her forehead forcibly removed by her supervisor at Silvergate Retirement Residence; her boss wiped her forehead clean with a dish cloth after she refused a request to remove the ashes herself.

In response to this incident, the league sought four outcomes: it wanted a public apology from Silvergate; disciplinary action against the offender; sensitivity training for Silvergate employees regarding religious liberty in the workplace; and a formal record of this incident placed in the personnel files of the woman. The league won on all four counts.

In a news release on this subject, the national office exclaimed that "It is unacceptable for someone to wipe the ashes from the forehead of a Catholic as it would be for him to yank the yarmulke from the head of a Jew." In a statement to the San Diego media, Horst argued that the offensive act "was unlawful and reveals an attitude towards Catholics which will not be tolerated."

From the beginning, no one at Silvergate denied that the offense had taken place. Nonetheless, there was initial resistance to the league's demands. But after public pressure was triggered by the league via the media, it soon became apparent that Silvergate had to yield.

An internal investigation by Silvergate revealed that the offense necessitated strong action. As a result, the guilty

supervisor was fired. Then came a personal apology, followed by a public apology. The workshops we asked for were announced to the staff and the woman's records were made to reflect what happened. The woman decided not to return to Silvergate, though she was given the opportunity to do so.

The chief administrator of Silvergate acted responsibly by saying, "I strongly disapprove of any discriminatory action based on an employee's religious beliefs. Our staff will receive the appropriate training regarding all Civil Liberty issues including those dealing with religious issues." He added, "A letter of apology has been sent to [name withheld to protect her privacy] in addition to this public apology and the necessary disciplinary actions have been taken regarding this matter based upon our findings to date."

League chapter president Horst was unyielding in his efforts to secure justice. He met with the woman and her family, communicated with Silvergate over the matter, discussed the incident with the media and let all parties know that the league would not rest until we won.

As always, the league's preference was to resolve this issue by mobilizing the court of public opinion, as opposed to entering a brief in court. But because of the gravity of this incident, Horst, an attorney, notified Silvergate that the league was prepared to enter both arenas.

The league is pleased with the action taken by the chief administrator of Silvergate and was only too happy to take the lead in resolving this case.