

## **2025 Year in Review**

### **Michael P. McDonald, Director of Communications**

As the cultural pendulum swung back towards tradition, reason, and faith, the Catholic League made significant contributions to the culture war in 2025. There are critical battles still raging, but we gained significant ground this year.

As a parting gift, Joe Biden would give the Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian award, to George Soros, a notorious anti-Catholic bigot who has done more to undermine western civilization and the United States than any single person. While disgraceful, this would be the last major insult from Biden. A few weeks later, President Trump would be inaugurated and the federal government began advancing the cause of religious liberty.

Trump quickly established his Religious Liberty Commission to end the weaponization of the government against Catholics and other people of faith. We eagerly looked for ways to assist the commission. Bill Donohue traveled to Washington to meet with a Department of Justice (DoJ) liaison. The Catholic League staff prepared a report that we shared with DoJ and the senior members of the commission to aid them in their work. This report was praised as the most detailed report on anti-Christian bias that the DoJ received.

Similarly, we renewed our efforts to get to the bottom of the FBI spying on Catholics. We continued to work with House Judiciary Chairman Jim Jordan, and we contacted FBI Director Kash Patel, who pledged to crack down on anti-Catholic bigotry. As part of these efforts, the Trump administration released new documents on this scheme. We learned that the FBI's hostility to Catholics was more widespread than we were initially led to believe.

Another major story was the passing of Pope Francis. On April 21, he died from complications after a long illness. He served as pope for 12 years, leaving behind a mixed legacy. Progressives cheered his emphasis on social justice and his pastoral approach; traditional minded people were outraged by his near ban of the Traditional Latin Mass and other changes he was making, especially regarding the Church's teachings on sexuality. Of course, Pope Francis' legacy was more nuanced than that and in multiple media appearances we explained that.

As we watched the conclave to select the successor to Pope Francis, we did numerous interviews. On May 8, Pope Leo XIV was elected. As a relatively unknown candidate, we pushed back on the narrative that he would be Francis II. More importantly, we were the first Catholic organization to spring to his defense

against trumped up charges from activists claiming he mishandled abuse cases in Peru.

This June, Bill participated in Fidelity Month by making a video about Flag Day and Father's Day. Begun two years ago by Princeton Professor Robert George, Fidelity Month is a time to celebrate God, family and country.

We also sent a letter to Apple TV over a scene in the popular show "Your Friends & Neighbors," which disgustingly mocked the Eucharist. We hit them hard for their defaming the Blessed Sacrament, and since then, there have been no repeat offenses.

Later in the summer, the IRS gave a great boon to religious liberty, when it updated its enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, giving greater freedom to 501(c)(3) organizations to participate in politics. After a Soros-funded "Catholic" organization used the IRS to attack us in 2008, we are glad to know that we won't have the IRS looking over our shoulder even though these changes won't have a substantial impact on how we operate.

When the media were totally silent about a report by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops noting the almost complete eradication of clergy sexual abuse, we highlighted this good news. Unfortunately, more Catholics do not underscore these accomplishments allowing militant secularists to use this issue as a red herring to justify their attacks.

For instance, in Montana and Washington State, politicians tried to break the Seal of Confession alleging priests learn about abuse through the sacrament. Of course, neither state could point to any evidence that this was a problem. Bill wrote letters to lawmakers in both states. Montana killed their legislation within a week of our intervention, but the rabid secularists in Washington were undeterred. It was only after the DoJ won in court that the assault on Confession stopped.

But, it is not just politicians that use clergy sexual abuse to harangue the Church. *The Free Press* had an article that grievously misrepresents the scandal, making it appear that it is ongoing and far more widespread. This screed should never have been published.

But worse still is the friendly fire from within the Church. We were contacted by lawyers representing the Diocese of Camden. They wanted help to prevent the New Jersey Attorney General from using a grand jury to target the dioceses, which would be contrary to state law.

We were glad to help. Our legal counsel submitted an amicus brief and delivered an oral argument before the New Jersey Supreme Court. Needless to say, we were the only organization to offer any support for the diocese.

But, just one week after the arguments, Bishop Joseph Williams decided to walk away from the case. Even though the diocese had won twice in lower courts, Bishop Williams threw in the towel on defending the due process rights of priests.

We were never contacted by anyone associated with the diocese about this decision. Instead, we found out from a priest in New Jersey. This is the thanks we get for trying to help. Ultimately, the New Jersey Supreme Court decided that the grand jury could proceed.

Another instance of friendly fire occurred when Brooklyn Bishop Emeritus Nicholas DiMarzio was sold out by the Archdiocese of Newark, after it agreed to shell out hundreds of thousands of dollars to two men who accused the bishop of abuse, even though a Vatican investigation cleared him of all wrongdoing.

Transgenderism remained a critical issue. We published approximately 25 articles and reports pushing back on this anti-Catholic and anti-scientific ideology, focusing on its inherently violent nature. While we dealt it serious blows, the elites and the secular-left are still wed to this issue. This is not only harmful to the poor people who have been seduced by transgenderism, it is also dangerous to everyone around them. Tragically, we saw that on several occasions.

On the morning of August 27, Robert Westman, a man who pretended to be a woman, opened fire on Catholic school children attending Mass at Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis. Two children were tragically killed by this transgender extremist. Many in the media and political life tried to spin his biography to suggest that it wasn't his adherence to transgenderism or hatred for Church teachings that prompted this attack. We quickly set the record straight.

Two weeks later, on September 10, a man, who identified as a furry online and in a relationship with a man who thought he was a woman, shot and killed Charlie Kirk at a rally at Utah Valley University. Kirk was assassinated because he was an outspoken Christian, and the shooter and his boyfriend held a deep animus for Kirk's Christian message.

These incidents highlight why the fight against transgenderism remains so pivotal.

We were also involved in several other cultural battles.

We marked the 10 year anniversary of the New York St. Patrick's Day parade allowing LGBT groups to march under their own banner with Bill recounting the betrayal.

Higher education remained a hotbed of culture war activity. At Columbia, a Catholic Ph.D. candidate faced disciplinary actions for making comments on social media that accurately reflected Church teachings. Meanwhile, Northwestern offered an "Introduction to Christianity" class that was nothing more than an assault on the Catholic Church. At St. John's University in New York, a law student verbally abused Cardinal Dolan. We vigorously called out the guilty parties and asked for the situations to be remedied.

We also took an in-depth look at the data on assisted suicide. Needless to say, the most secular states in the nation lead the way in this horrific trend, and this will continue to grow into a major flashpoint in the culture wars. We were able to get out in front of this battle and laid down a crucial marker.

Politically, one of the biggest events was the election of Zohran Mamdani to be New York City Mayor. Bill authored an 18-page report unmasking Mamdani's phoniness. We made several other statements and media appearances warning of the threat Mamdani poses to religious liberty. Unfortunately, New York is too far gone, and Mamdani won. Worryingly, his victory may set a pattern that the left might use across America. Not to be deterred, we started a comprehensive "Mamdani Watch" to track what he is doing, providing a check to his hostility to people of faith.

We scored a big victory when we convinced Sen. Dick Durbin to decline a "Lifetime Achievement Award" from the Archdiocese of Chicago. We were the only lay Catholic organization to press Durbin to turn down the award. We sent him several letters pointing out that most of the policies he supported were contrary to Catholic teaching. The tipping point came once we provided the email of his chief of staff, and our subscribers to pound away. One day later, Durbin yielded.

The war on Christmas remains a critical flashpoint.

Initially, we sought to run a billboard in Washington with the message, "Christians Take Note. *Religious Liberty is Thriving Again*. Celebrate Christmas Like Never Before!"

Unfortunately, we were informed that D.C. bureaucrats would not approve the message unless we removed “Christians.” We refused to bend to these dictates and looked for a new way to promote religious liberty.

We often get complaints from members about homeowners associations (HOA) being too restrictive with religious symbols at Christmas. To counter this, we took the resources we were planning on using for the D.C. billboard and used that to contact over 2,000 HOA officials asking them to respect the religious rights of the people in their communities. This helped minimize the attacks on religious liberty this Christmas.

We called out officials in Portland, Oregon, who used their Christmas tree lighting ceremony to promote woke causes. We contacted officials in St. Petersburg and Pensacola, Florida, about a drag show that mocked Christmas that was using city-owned theaters for the performances. We once again had to battle with a co-op in Larchmont that refused to display a crèche alongside a menorah. Like last year, they chose to be intolerant and have no decorations, but at least we were able to end the anti-Christian discrimination. We also continued our decades-long tradition of displaying a life-sized nativity scene in Central Park.

Just days before Christmas, it was announced that the Vatican accepted Cardinal Dolan’s resignation. His support of our mission was unyielding. We will miss our close relationship with him and look forward to getting acquainted with his successor.

Looking back, 2025 was a banner year. We made great strides in advancing religious liberty and pushed back on anti-Catholicism. While we reclaimed significant ground in the culture war, there are still critical battles ahead. As we look forward to 2026, we will keep pushing the advantage and joyfully look forward to the fights and, more importantly, the victories to come.