



William H. Dempsey  
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March 18, 2016

His Eminence, Donald Cardinal Wuerl  
Archbishop of Washington, D.C.  
Box 29260  
Washington, D.C. 20017-0260

Your Eminence:

I write on behalf of the officers and directors of Sycamore Trust to urge you to decline the honorary degree tendered to you by Father John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., on behalf of the University of Notre Dame.

Sycamore Trust ([www.sycamoretrust.org](http://www.sycamoretrust.org)) is an unofficial organization of alumni and other members of the Notre Dame family dedicated to the preservation of the Catholic identity of the university. It was founded ten years ago in the wake of the approval by Father Jenkins of The Vagina Monologues and the Queer Film Festival. Our central concern is the radical decline of Catholic faculty representation, but we regularly publish bulletins about significant matters relating to the Catholic character of the school. Our subscribers number some 16,000.

We need not elaborate on the statement of Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades respecting the scandal the university gives by awarding the Laetare Medal to Vice President Joseph Biden, except perhaps to note that Bishop Rhoades does not (and need not) describe the full breadth of Vice President Biden's opposition to the Church. In addition to his strong support of Roe v. Wade and of same sex marriage, Vice President Biden endorses federal support for embryonic stem research and the abortifacient/contraception mandate. That is to say, he opposes the position taken in court by both you for the Archdiocese and Father Jenkins for Notre Dame.

The scandal is especially grave because the Vice President regularly professes his Catholicism and the award is given for "outstanding service to the Church," so that the public will naturally conclude that Notre Dame doesn't think his open opposition to the Church amounts to much.

One further observation respecting religious liberty: In calling those who oppose same-sex marriage "bigots," the Vice President lends the dignity of his office to the term that the pro-gay forces wield as their principal weapon in their determination to flatten utterly those who seek to follow the precepts of their religion and their consciences.

guardian of the grotto



*Alumni Protecting Notre Dame's Catholic Identity*

Whatever the circumstances may have been when Father Jenkins offered the honorary degree, we respectfully submit that the statement by Bishop Rhoades has materially altered the landscape.

Even before Bishop Rhoades spoke, the prospect of your presence was anticipated as signaling approval of the award and therefore as diminishing the importance of the Church teachings that the Vice President disregards. In his widely distributed article in the National Catholic Reporter, Michael Sean Winters declared:

“In a sense, the most important word in the [Notre Dame] press release is the last: ‘Wuerl.’ ... His presence will spread a kind of imprimatur over the award the way the cold Indiana breeze will spread his red ferriola in the wind.”

Now, your presence will be taken in addition as approval both of Father Jenkins’s disregard of the considered and fully warranted objection of Notre Dame’s bishop and also, more broadly, of what this means about the relationship that should obtain between bishop and university. It is pertinent also that in this instance there is a radical disproportion between the respective interests – protection of the Church and Catholics against scandal respecting important Church teachings, on the one hand, and honoring a prominent Catholic dissenter for his civility, on the other.

Father Jenkins’s stance of determined independence from his bishop is, of course, nothing new. He adopted it at the outset of his tenure in his open breach with Bishop D’Arcy over The Vagina Monologues, continued it with the honoring of President Obama, and now we have this unhappy episode – with, doubtless, unpublicized instances along the way.

We earnestly entreat you to act so as to show your support for Bishop Rhoades in the exercise of his “right and duty to watch over the preservation and strengthening of the Catholic character” of Notre Dame” (Ex Corde Ecclesiae 5.2) rather than for Father Jenkins in his rejection of the bishop’s counsel.

Respectfully,

William H. Dempsey, Chairman  
Sycamore Trust

For its Officers and Directors:

William H. Dempsey, Chairman  
Joseph A. Reich, Jr., Vice President  
George L. Heidkamp, Treasurer  
Elizabeth Kirk, Secretary  
Timothy M. Dempsey, Executive Director

David P. Bender, Jr.  
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