




What's Happening to Notre Dame?

Alumni & Friends Protecting Notre Dame's Catholic Identity

EVIDENCE OF THE EROSION OF CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Representative Incidents



Rev. Gerry Olinger, C.S.C.
Vice President for Student Affairs

Gender Identity

May not match their biological sex

Most of the following summaries relate to recent events. There are many more both from recent and earlier years in the bulletins of Sycamore Trust.

The fault lines in the university's Catholic identity these episodes disclose have their roots in the erosion of the Catholic presence on the faculty. That decline has been so steep that Notre Dame no longer meets its own test of Catholic identity, i.e., a majority of dedicated Catholics on the faculty.

Father Jenkins inherited this default. The percentage of Catholic faculty plummeted during the long tenure of Father Malloy. But instead of taking on the challenge of restoring a predominantly Catholic faculty in the face of faculty resistance, he accepted a faculty recommendation that the hiring of Catholic faculty continue at the current rate.

The predictable result has been that, up to 2019, the proportion of Catholic faculty remained below water at a virtually unchanged level, and since then it has probably dropped further -- a reasonable inference from the administration's unprecedented recent refusal to disclose current faculty composition data.

A university's identity, of course, depends on who teaches and what they teach. At Notre Dame, the attenuation of Catholic presence on the faculty is what led Professor Alfred Freddoso to describe Notre Dame as "something like a public school in a Catholic neighborhood."

But the dominant character of the faculty also reverberates outside the classroom and in the actions of an administration sensitive to faculty praise and criticism. Just as the dominant character of the Notre Dame faculty is incompatible with Catholic identity, so, too, are the incidents listed below and many others like them.

2023 Commencement Speaker

The 2023 commencement speaker and recipient of an honorary degree, Juan Manuel Santos, is pro-choice on abortion and pro-same-sex marriage. When president of Columbia, he unsuccessfully sought to liberalize Chile's strict anti-abortion law, and he applauded the subsequent court decision doing just that. As to same-sex marriage, he recently declared: "Marriage between homosexuals to me is perfectly acceptable."

In this instance and in all those listed in the next paragraph, Father Jenkins's actions have violated the injunction of the nation's bishops that "The Catholic community and Catholic institutions should not honor those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles."

Actions Condemned by Bishop

Father Jenkins's widely publicized actions condemned by Notre Dame's bishop:

1. The Vagina Monologues.

Early in his tenure, Father Jenkins granted permission for the student production of *The Vagina Monologues*, a play defined by extraordinarily explicit accounts by women of highly charged sexual episodes, typically but not exclusively lesbian sex (including seduction of a minor) and masturbation. Bishop John D'Arcy repeatedly denounced Father Jenkins's decision, and the United Conference of Catholic Bishops moved a conference from the campus when Father Jenkins refused to reschedule a performance of the play slated to coincide with the bishops' event.

2. Honoring President Obama.

In 2009, at Father Jenkins's invitation, President Obama delivered the commencement address and received an honorary degree. Jenkins's decision was denounced by Bishop D'Arcy (Jenkins "chose prestige over truth"), by 82 other cardinals, bishops and archbishops, and by countless Catholics and Catholic organizations across the country. Dr. Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School, subsequently ambassador to the Vatican, turned down an offer of the Laetare Medal in protest.

3. Honoring Vice President Biden.

In 2016, Father Jenkins, rejecting the counsel of Bishop Kevin Rhoades, Bishop D'Arcy's successor, awarded Notre Dame's prestigious Laetare Medal to then Vice-President Joe Biden. The medal is given for "outstanding service to the Church and society." Bishop Rhoades said:

In honoring a "pro-choice" Catholic who also has supported the redefinition of marriage, which the Church considers harmful to the common good of society, it can give the impression to people, including Catholics in political office, that one can be "a good Catholic" while also supporting or advocating for positions that contradict our fundamental moral and social principles and teachings

4. Inviting President Biden to be honored again.

In 2021, despite Biden's ever more aggressive promotion of abortion and the LGBTQ agenda, Father Jenkins invited him to be honored as commencement speaker. Biden, evidently fearing demonstrations, declined, pleading a conflict that turned out to be a weekend with his wife at Camp David.

Rejecting Church Teaching on Gender

In a presentation to new students in the fall of 2022, Fr. Gerry Olinger, Vice President for Student Affairs, showed a video on gender theory squarely in conflict with Church teaching, e.g.,

"A person's gender identity may not match a person's biological sex."

"Gender identity is a person's inner sense of being a male, female, or differently gendered person."

"Transgender refers to someone whose internal gender identity doesn't match their biological sex."

Fr. Olinger did not respond to an Open Letter from over 2,200 Notre Dame alumni, family, and students seeking an explanation, and Fr. Jenkins did not respond to Bill Dempsey's inquiry whether Fr. Olinger's views reflected the university's.



5. Normalization of same-sex relations – Notre Dame theatre. Over the past year, students and the Film, Television and Theater Department have produced plays in which Hamlet and Cyrano de Bergerac were played by females in lesbian love affairs, and the Much Ado About Nothing production was advertised by university-approved posters of two men kissing.
6. Normalization of same-sex relations – NDAA. In 2021, the Alumni Association, in collaboration with the unofficial Gay & Lesbian Alumni Association of Notre Dame (GALA), established an LGBTQ “affinity group,” ARC, headed by the same-sex married president of GALA. GALA is dedicated to the celebration of same-sex marriage, and ARC’s first official event on campus was an awards dinner honoring Greg Bourke, the same-sex married alumnus who was plaintiff in the Supreme Court litigation resulting in the validation of same-sex marriage as a constitutional right.
7. Normalization of same-sex relations – ND Press and Fr. Jenkins. Also in 2021, Notre Dame Press published and praised Bourke’s autobiography in which he recounts his experience as a Catholic homosexual activist



during his long relationship with his “husband,” including in particular the same-sex marriage Supreme Court litigation. He quotes Father Jenkins as writing him “We are proud to call you a graduate of Notre Dame,” and he recounts that in a meeting Jenkins was “gracious about congratulating me on the historic decision that changed forever the way the country would define marriage.”

8. Normalization of Same-Sex relations – Pete Buttigieg appointment. In 2020, Father Jenkins gave the pro-abortion same-sex married Pete Buttigieg a temporary parking place on the Notre Dame campus.
9. Seeking more LGBT students. In a 2021 Irish Rover interview, admissions officer Joe Bishop disclosed that the university’s Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policy has been expanded to include LGBTQ student applicants.
10. Abortion – Gender Relations Studies Program. The GRP is a pro-abortion force with widespread support in other departments. It has recently staged two pro-abortion panels, the latest with the endorsement of a host of faculty departments – the Departments of History, Political Science, English, Sociology, American Studies, Anthropology, Film, Television and Theatre, as well as the Center for Social Concerns, the Institute for Latino Studies, and the Initiative for Race and Resilience.
11. The pro-abortion campaigns of professor Tamara Kay and her faculty allies. Professor Kay, with two faculty colleagues, has promoted abortion in op-eds in several prominent newspapers and on campus. Her campaign has drawn widespread attention. When Father Jenkins, in a letter to one of the newspapers distanced the university from Kay’s op-ed while saying she was free to support abortion on and off campus, the Sociology Department supported Kay and criticized Jenkins.
12. Father Jenkins and free contraceptives at Notre Dame. Notre Dame initially resisted the Obamacare requirement that it facilitate its insurer’s provision of free contraceptives to employees and students under its health plan. The university declared this would be “contrary to its faith.” But after years of litigation and even though the new Trump administration offered to concede, Father Jenkins suddenly withdrew Notre Dame’s objection. Over 100 Notre Dame alumni attorneys signed an Open Letter charging the administration with apparent misrepresentations to the court. For those students not on the health plan, a student organization delivers free contraceptives to dormitories on request and without objection by the administration.

There is a good deal more, but these incidents are sufficient to illustrate how the fading of Catholic presence in the classroom has been accompanied by the frequent triumph of secular values outside the classroom.

THE FIGHT TO DEFEND OUR LADY'S UNIVERSITY

Loyal Sons & Daughters By Her Side



Pro-life Notre Dame students protest the honoring of President Obama at their commencement, May 17, 2009.

Slowly, Slowly, Slowly...

The flash-point for the founders of Sycamore was Father Jenkins's 2005 approval of the student on-campus performance of *The Vagina Monologues* and the continuation of *The Queer Film Festival*, albeit under a less revealing name. We soon discovered, however, that the problem was not simply a few errant administration decisions but something much more fundamental: the radical deterioration of the Catholic identity of the faculty over the past several decades.

So said concerned faculty members, and our examination of many studies of the secularization of religious schools confirmed that it always results from the loss by the faculty of its anchor in the founding faith. The episodes that have clashed with Catholic identity during Father Jenkins's tenure — including the 2009 honoring of President Obama, then the Church's most formidable adversary on abortion — have been symptoms of this phenomenon.

We have described these episodes in many bulletins over the years. Besides the *Vagina Monologues*, the *Queer Film Festival*, and the honoring of President Obama, they have included the award of the Laetare Medal and an invitation to be Commencement speaker to Vice President Biden, now the Church's

most formidable adversary on sex, marriage, gender and religious liberty; the provision of spousal benefits to employee spouses in same-sex marriages; the provision of contraceptives to students and employees through University health insurance programs; the Gender Studies Program's support of abortion and transgenderism, the establishment of an LGBTQ alumni group whose first act was to honor prominent same-sex marriage and gender change champions, and the indoctrination of freshmen in transgender theory by the Holy Cross Vice President of Student Affairs

In the course of these episodes, the University has four times publicly rejected the strong objections of its bishop, been rebuked by 84 cardinals, archbishops and bishops (in the Obama affair), and repudiated the representations it made to the federal courts that it could not in conscience provide contraceptives to its students and employees.

The Faculty Problem

Catholic representation on Notre Dame's faculty has plunged so far that the school no longer meets its own Mission Statement test of Catholic identity, i.e., "a predominant number of Catholics" on the faculty. The author of this Mission Statement requirement, then-President Rev. Edward Malloy, C.S.C., said that this "means more than a mere majority," and Father Jenkins, the

current President, speaks of “Catholic faculty” as “those who have been spiritually formed in that tradition and who embrace it.” Former Provost Thomas Burish declared that the Mission Statement requires “a majority of faculty who are Catholic, who understand the nature of the religion, who can be role models.”

Notre Dame does not come close to passing this test. The proportion of those who check the “Catholic box” on a form when hired has plummeted from 85% in the 1970s to 54% today – and this indisputably includes a large, if indeterminate, number of merely nominal and dissenting Catholics. Plainly, there is no longer close to a majority of committed Catholics. At best, estimates are that only 20-30% meet this test.

Catholic on Paper Only

Professor Emeritus Dr. Walter J. Nicgorski, one of Notre Dame’s most respected and longest serving professors, took note of the large number of Catholic on paper professors at Notre Dame and its consequences during one of our panel discussions:

Along with the steady and steep decline of the percentage of faculty who are Catholics to about 50 per cent, there is the widely shared recognition that a large number of those who list themselves as Catholics are not inclined to be involved in any concerns about the religious character of this university....So it is increasingly the case today that a young person going through the critical and questioning formative years of an education at Notre Dame might not encounter a practicing Catholic informed and engaged by the Catholic intellectual tradition.... One might say that beneath the large symbols of the University as a Catholic institution, there is reason for concern that the day-to-day struggles for learning and intellectual and professional development are not notably impacted by the Catholic tradition.

The reason for this deterioration of Catholic faculty presence is that Notre Dame’s leaders, beginning with Father Hesburgh, have pursued “academic excellence” with insufficient regard for the consequences of diluting Catholic faculty representation.

One of those consequences besides the impact in the classroom is that an increasingly secular faculty seeks to perpetuate itself. Thus, Notre Dame’s Faculty Senate has asserted that the loss of Catholic identity is a price that should be paid if necessary to enhance Notre Dame’s academic credentials. Based on a survey of the faculty, the Senate declared that

The University should not compromise its academic aspirations in its efforts to maintain its Catholic identity.

At a school in which Catholic scholars predominated, this statement would, of course, be exactly reversed.

Catholic in Sight Only

The insidious aspect of this transformation of the faculty and accordingly of what is taught – the heart of the university – is that it takes hold gradually and out of sight. The outward signs of Catholicism remain much the same, and accordingly alumni and others believe the university is just as Catholic as it has always been.

Professor Emeritus Dr. Alfred J. Freddoso, a longtime distinguished philosophy professor, captured these dual characteristics of the University in his illuminating introduction to the late Dr. Charles E. Rice’s book “What Happened to Notre Dame.” Memorably describing Notre Dame as “something like a public school in a Catholic neighborhood,” Dr. Freddoso continued:

This might sound appalling to some, but it is, I submit, what the vast majority of present-day administrators, faculty members, students and alumni mean when they sincerely, though mistakenly, claim that Notre Dame is a Catholic university. For they assume without much thought that the Catholic character of the university is borne almost entirely by the ‘neighborhood, i.e., by the university’s sacramental life and associated activities such as retreats, bible study groups, sacramental preparation courses, etc.; by various good works and service projects on and off campus; by a set of faith-inspired rules governing campus life... and by the sheer number of “outdoor” and “indoor” manifestations of Catholicism such as the statue of Our Lady atop the Golden Dome, Sacred Heart Basilica, the Grotto, and scores of statues found all over the “neighborhood.” It is here that virtually all of a student’s moral and spiritual formation, if any, will take place.... The classroom or laboratory, by contrast, is a wholly different venue....This is where “reason” resides on campus and where “the mind is educated”; and it has little or nothing to do with Catholicism.

In these circumstances, while Notre Dame is, we believe, the most Catholic of the major Catholic universities except for Catholic University, and while a committed and discriminating student can still obtain a splendid Catholic education, the situation is not so happy for the vast run of the students.

The Good News and Bad News

The good news is that, after Sycamore Trust began publishing the incriminating faculty composition data and the administration took some remedial steps, the downward spiral was checked for a long time. But the bad news is that after a drop in Catholic faculty representation a couple of years

ago, the administration has refused for the first time to disclose current data. The dark implication is plain.

Still, hope remains because of an outstanding and still substantial core of Catholic scholars, a number of supportive non-Catholic faculty, a 75% Catholic student body, a number of vibrant Catholic student organizations, the continuing, if diminished, presence of priests on the campus, and the “Catholic neighborhood” described by Dr. Freddoso.

We believe that Sycamore Trust can play a role in the realization of that hope. Sycamore can look to significant results over the last 17 years that can reasonably be attributed in some substantial measure to its efforts.

1. Most importantly, the decline in Catholic faculty was arrested. In 2005, it seemed likely that Catholic faculty would slip into even an arithmetical minority before long. Until Sycamore put the spotlight on this crucial



problem, few outside the university knew anything about it and efforts within the university had been unavailing.

2. A board member who was a major contributor to a pro-abortion organization resigned.
3. Another board member who was an important promoter of embryonic stem cell research did not stand for re-election.
4. The Vagina Monologues quietly disappeared.
5. So, too, did the Queer Film Festival.
6. After we wrote to him, Father Jenkins left his position on the board of a prominent organization, Millennium Promise, that promotes abortion and contraception. (So, too, did a major Notre Dame donor.)
7. Our disclosure of the falsity of the University's asserted justification for the trespass prosecution of the pro-life demonstrators who protested the honoring of President Obama almost certainly played a role in the University's finally dismissing the charges. Father Jenkins had explained the University's policy was to have all trespassing demonstrators prosecuted. Wrong. On his watch the policy was “catch and release” for pro-gay and anti- military trespassers.
8. We have marshalled substantial financial support for Catholic student organizations that are crucially important to Notre Dame's Catholic identity, and we have recently begun providing grants of up to \$5,000 to leaders of these organizations in recognition of their contributions.
9. A contraceptive ad on The Observer Internet site was taken down immediately upon our complaint.
10. So, too, was a link to a porn site of uncertain provenance on a web site of a student organization.
11. The University eliminated its website recommendation of an unofficial women's faculty organization that promoted pro- abortion organizations.
12. Within 24 hours of Sycamore Trust's disclosure that the University planned to make abortions eligible for cost savings in its Flexible Savings Plan for employees, the University canceled the plan.
13. The University has also ended the coverage of abortifacients in its Flexible Savings Plan.

Thus, there is good reason both to keep hope alive and to support our conviction that, with the help of alumni and others with a deep interest in Notre Dame and Catholic higher education, Sycamore Trust can play a significant role in the effort to restore the Catholic identity that is the defining heritage of this precious institution.

EXTRACTS FROM NOTRE DAME'S

Mission Statement

1

The University of Notre Dame is a Catholic academic community of higher learning....

As a Catholic university, one of its distinctive goals is to provide a forum where, through free inquiry and open discussion, the various lines of Catholic thought may intersect with all the forms of knowledge found in the arts, sciences, professions, and every other area of human scholarship and creativity.... The Catholic identity of the University depends upon, and is nurtured by, the continuing presence of a predominant number of Catholic intellectuals.... The University encourages a way of living consonant with a Christian community and manifest in prayer, liturgy and service. Residential life endeavors to develop that sense of community and of responsibility that prepares students for subsequent leadership in building a society that is at once more human and more divine.

2

No genuine search for the truth in the human or the cosmic order is alien to the life of faith.

The University welcomes all areas of scholarly activity as consonant with its mission, subject to appropriate critical refinement. There is, however, a special obligation and opportunity, specifically as a Catholic university, to pursue the religious dimensions of all human learning. Only thus can Catholic intellectual life in all disciplines be animated and fostered and a proper community of scholarly religious discourse be established.

3

In all dimensions of the University, Notre Dame pursues its objectives through the formation of an authentic human community graced by the Spirit of Christ.



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