



July 4, 2011

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your interest in learning more about Sycamore Trust and considering a tax-deductible donation to help us protect Notre Dame's Catholic identity.

Sycamore Trust was established in 2005 to provide a source of information, a means of communication, and a collective voice to Notre Dame alumni and others in the Notre Dame family concerned about preserving the Catholic identity of the University.

The flashpoint for the founders of Sycamore was Father Jenkins's authorization of the student on-campus performance of *The Vagina Monologues*. What was especially disappointing was that he retreated in the face of faculty opposition, for he had initially said that he thought this obscene play probably should not be staged at a Catholic university. (Ultimately, Notre Dame became the poster school in a tiny group of only 15 out of some 225 Catholic institutions welcoming the *Monologues*.) At the same time, moreover, Father Jenkins approved the continuation of *The Queer Film Festival*, albeit under a less revealing name.

We soon discovered that the problem was not simply a few errant presidential decisions but something much more fundamental: the radical deterioration of the Catholic identity of the faculty over the past several decades. So said a number of 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 visibly clashed with Catholic identity during the tenures of both Father Malloy and Father Jenkins – including the 2009 honoring of President Obama, the Church's most formidable adversary on abortion – are symptoms of this phenomenon.

The *Vagina Monologues* and Obama episodes reflect two of the school's most serious problems: the dominance of secular forces in the faculty and the disjunction between the University and the Church. Thus, Father Jenkins's reversal respecting *The Vagina Monologues* resulted from a clamor by faculty in the name of academic freedom and the school's image in secular academe, while the honoring of Obama in violation of an important policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and despite the protests of 83 Cardinals, Archbishops, and Bishops disclosed an alarming breach between University and Church.

guardian of the grotto

As to the faculty, Catholic representation has plunged so far that the school no longer meets its own test of Catholic identity. The Mission Statement declares, "The University's Catholic identity depends upon the continuing presence of a predominant number of Catholics." The author, then-President Rev. Edward Malloy, C.S.C., said this "means more than a mere majority," and Rev. John Jenkins, C.S.C., the current President, speaks of "Catholic faculty" as "those who have been spiritually formed in that tradition and who embrace it." 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.. The proportion of those who check the "Catholic" box on a form has plummeted from 85% in the 1970's to 53% today. 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.

Dr. Walter J. Nicgorski, one of Notre Dame's most respected and longest serving professors, took note of this phenomenon and its consequences during a recent panel discussion. While praising Notre Dame's many fine attributes, he sounded this sobering alarm:

Consider this also, 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, that curricular decisions and other decisions, including counseling decisions, will not be notably impacted by a Catholic perspective. 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 attitude of the dominant forces on the faculty toward the loss of Catholic identity has been dramatically displayed in this recent resolution of the Faculty Senate adopted after a survey of the faculty:

"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.



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. And most probably do not really want to think otherwise.

Dr. Alfred J. Freddoso, a long-time and distinguished philosophy professor, has captured these dual characteristics of the University in his memorable description of Notre Dame as “something like a public school in a Catholic neighborhood.” He continued in this illuminating and troubling passage in his introduction to Dr. Charles E. Rice’s book “What Happened to Notre Dame”:

"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 probably 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; and worse, the future looks bleak absent a major reversal of the hiring pattern of the last several decades. That is the heart of the problem.

But hope remains because of an outstanding and still substantial, if dwindling, corps of Catholic scholars, a number of supportive non-Catholics, an 85% Catholic student body, the continuing, if diminished, presence of priests on the campus, and important features of "Catholic neighborhood" such as those identified by Dr. Freddoso.

We believe, moreover, that Sycamore Trust can play a role in the realization of that hope. In its short life, Sycamore can look to some positive results that can reasonably be attributed in some substantial measure to its efforts. Here is what has happened on some of the issues upon which we have focused:



1. A newly elected member of the Board of Trustees was obliged to resign when her support of pro-choice organizations was discovered and publicized
2. The Vagina Monologues has quietly disappeared.
3. So, too, has the Queer Film Festival.
4. Most importantly, the decline in Catholic faculty has been arrested, though not reversed. Four years ago, it seemed likely that by now Catholics would have slipped into even an arithmetical minority. Until Sycamore put the spotlight on this crucial problem, few outside the university knew anything about it and no effective action had been taken by those within the University.
5. 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.)
6. A contraceptive ad on The Observer Internet site was taken down immediately upon our complaint.
7. So, too, was a link to a porn site of uncertain provenance on a web site of a student organization.
8. The University eliminated its web site recommendation of an unofficial women's faculty organization that promotes pro-abortion organizations.
9. Our investigation into the University's asserted justification for its support of the prosecution of the pro-life demonstrators who protested the honoring of President Obama almost certainly played a role in the University's finally reversing its position and securing dismissal of the charges. Father Jenkins had asserted that the University must treat all trespassers the same. We discovered that it does nothing of the sort. Rather, on Father Jenkins's watch, the University had decided against prosecution of pro-gay and anti-military demonstrators who had been arrested for trespass. This embarrassingly disparate treatment was to have been an important element in the defense of these pro-life advocates.
10. We marshaled substantial and critically needed financial support for two important student organizations: NDResponse, the federation of student organizations opposed to the honoring of President Obama, and The Irish Rover, the independent voice of Catholicism on campus. We regard the support of centers of Catholicism on campus as part of our mission.

To be sure, there are qualifications to some of these successes. For example, there is good reason to think that the halt in the faculty erosion may be temporary; and in any

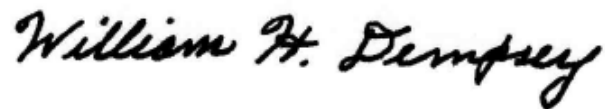


case, there has been no reversal in the trend but only stabilization at an unsatisfactory level. Again, the Monologues and the film festival might return.

Even so, there has been sufficient progress 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.

We earnestly invite you to assist in this important mission.

Sincerely,



William H. Dempsey ('52)  
President  
whdempsey@sycamoretrust.org

For  
Joseph A. Reich, Jr. ('57)  
*Vice President*  
George L. Heidkamp ('52)  
*Secretary/Treasurer*

Edmund J. Adams (JD '63)  
David P. Bender, Jr ('78)  
Dr. Daniel M. Boland ('56, '61)  
Timothy M. Dempsey ('89)  
Arina O. Grossu, ('06)  
Dr. John A. Gueguen, Jr. ('56, '58)  
Dr. Thomas S. Hibbs ('83, '87)  
Elizabeth Kirk ('96)  
Rev. John J. Raphael, SSJ ('89)  
Lisa Scapellati ('81)  
Dr. Susan Biddle Shearer ('88)

*For more on our board members go to*  
[SycamoreTrust.org/board](http://SycamoreTrust.org/board)

