

## **CONCERNED CATHOLIC STUDENTS AT ST. THOMAS**

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October 7, 2008

Rev. Dennis Dease, President  
University of St. Thomas  
2115 Summit Avenue  
Saint Paul, MN 55105

Father Dease,

We write you not as Republicans, but as Catholics concerned about the hateful, anti-Catholic rhetoric that has come from an individual who will be speaking on campus this week.

Comedian, radio host, and current U.S. Senate candidate Al Franken has a long, documented history of both ridiculing the Catholic Church and mocking the Holy Sacraments of Communion and Confession. His remarks attack the heart of our religion and everything the University stands for.

Mr. Franken has:

- Joked about Jesus Christ lusting over Mary Magdalene;
- Imagined finding the skeleton of our Lord and Savior still attached to the cross and then proceeding to sell pieces of His skeleton;
- That God has His "head up His" posterior for what is written in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11;
- Calls the Church's stance on stem cells "idiotic;"
- Wrote a skit for *Saturday Night Live* that used dogs to mock confession; and
- Has shown an utter lack of respect for the Sacrament of Holy Communion by likening the Body of Christ to a chip to be accompanied with guacamole and performing a skit in which he played a priest giving Communion to pedophiles.

Attached you will find news clippings from around the state in which Catholic leaders have criticized Mr. Franken for his intolerance to our religion.

We aren't asking that you rescind Mr. Franken's invitation to campus. We are simply asking that we be given a chance to address our concerns to Mr. Franken, directly, in an open and public dialogue facilitated by yourself or a faculty member from the Theology department. Such an arrangement, we feel, falls under the very convictions of the University: pursuit of the truth, and actively engaged Catholic intellectual tradition valuing the fundamental compatibility of faith and reason and fosters meaningful dialogue, and respecting the dignity of each person.

If our request is granted, we promise a respectful, but thoughtful discussion about what our faith means to us and how words like Mr. Franken's cause harm to people of faith. Your assistant may reach us by contacting Cathy Brudzinski at 651-398-2847. We thank you in advance for your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

Cathy Brudzinski  
Corey Dahl  
Tom Brudzinski  
Alison Goossens  
Rachel Berg  
Amanda Larson  
Sara Kovach  
Caitlin Radick  
Diane Kulseth  
Dan Hillenbrand

cc: University of St. Thomas Board of Trustees

cc: University of St. Thomas Theology Department, Dr. Bernard Brady, Chair

cc: University of St. Thomas Catholic Studies Department, Dr. Don J. Briel, Director

**Attached: News Clips - Minnesota Catholic Leaders Speak Out**

## News Clips - Minnesotan Catholic Leaders Speak Out



### **GOP activists claim Franken is anti-Catholic**

By Matthew Stolle, Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN, 9/25/2008 10:00:39 AM

ROCHESTER - Three area Republican activists urged voters to reject DFL nominee Al Franken for U.S. Senate because of what they called his insensitive and mocking statements about the Catholic religion.

They said his jokes about communion, Mary Magdalene and his dismissive attitude toward the Catholic Church went too far. Franken once referred to its stance on stem cell research as "idiotic" on his radio show.

"There are lots of humorists who use their positions to unite people or to improve things. His attitude isn't one of just disagreeing. It's one of belittling and demeaning," Dr. Phil Araoz said.

Araoz was one of three Catholics at a Rochester media event organized Wednesday by the campaign of GOP Sen. Norm Coleman. The others were Fran Bradley, a former state representative, and Pauline Varley, a GOP activist.

Coleman, a first-term senator, is seeking a second term in the Senate, and polls so far show the two candidates in a statistical dead heat.

Franken campaign responds

The Franken campaign released a brief statement, acknowledging that the former comedian wasn't proud of every joke he's told, but was prepared to debate the issue of character with Coleman. It said Franken was focused on his plans to help the middle class.

Wednesday's event was the latest installment of a strategy aimed at casting a harsh spotlight on remarks and statements Franken made as a former comedian and liberal radio host. A two-page summary of Franken remarks under the heading, "The Facts about Al Franken's Catholic Bashing," was distributed at the news conference.

The summary highlighted pieces of fictional writing in which an ex-president Franken finds the complete skeleton of Jesus Christ and sells pieces of it at his presidential library. It highlights imaginary conversations Franken has with a foul-mouthed God. It also quotes Franken as referring to religion as a "crutch" in times of adversity.

Religious slurs

Varley said she sees a double standard in the way people respond to such statements. There would have been an outcry if the comments in question had been racial in nature. But because the slur is against religion, some people might consider Franken's comments funny. She doesn't.

"Frankly, I don't consider my religion a crutch, especially in times of adversity, as he said. I consider my religion a strength. Someone who doesn't have a religious belief or practice it would not be a good representative for me in the Senate," Varley said.

Similar events focused on shedding light on Franken's statement were held in Crookston, St. Cloud, Grand Rapids and Marshall, a Coleman aide said. Bradley said people shouldn't be quick to dismiss his concerns simply because he is a Republican. He said he was asked by the Coleman camp to participate, but wouldn't have done so if he hadn't found the remarks offensive.

"Look at the record," Bradley said. "If you have some doubt about me because I'm a Republican, you can't change the fact we've given specific references and people can draw their own conclusions."

Catholics make up about a quarter of the population in Minnesota. There are approximately 27,000 Catholics in Olmsted County, according to the Association of Religion Data Archives, but they are far from a monolithic voting bloc. One survey by the National Catholic Reporter found that 41 percent of Catholics are Democrats, 37 percent Republicans and 22 percent independents.

## **Letter To The Editor: Franken's rhetoric is undignified**

10/4/2008 7:55:38 AM

I hope Minnesotans of every faith will take a moment to read my letter.

I am a Roman Catholic so it is understandable that I take unspeakable offense at Al Franken's mockery of Holy Communion, which Catholics believe is the Real Presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is also understandable that I find Mr. Franken's mocking of the Sacrament of Confession, his vulgar name-calling of the late John Cardinal O'Connor, and his description of the church's stance on stem cell research as "idiotic," as nothing short of breathtaking.

But you do not have to be a Roman Catholic, a Christian, or even a person of faith to believe that this is not the kind of behavior we should come to expect in an elected official in any public office, let alone the U.S. Senate. The faith and values of all people deserve at least a modicum of respect from any man or woman on the street, and certainly no less from a man who wants to be a senator.

On Nov. 4, let's uphold our dignity and the dignity of our state, the U.S. Senate, and our country. Defeat Al Franken and what he stands for.

Pauline Varley, Rochester



## **Pair accuses Franken of bias**

By Lawrence Schumacher • [lschumacher@stcloudtimes.com](mailto:lschumacher@stcloudtimes.com) • September 25, 2008

ST. CLOUD - Two St. Cloud Republicans are leading a local effort on behalf of U.S. Sen. Norm Coleman's re-election campaign. They are alleging his DFL opponent, Al Franken, is biased against Catholics.

At a news conference Wednesday with a handful of other St. Cloud residents, Rep. Steve Gottwalt, R-St. Cloud, and former Republican House candidate Sue Ek cited a laundry list of statements the Republican Party has collected from Franken's past writings, radio shows, television sketches and statements that they said demonstrate his disrespect for Catholics.

"I'm here as a Catholic, not as a Republican," said Ek, a natural family planning advocate. "If this sort of thing went on against Jews, there would be an uproar."

Ek and Gottwalt cited a conversation Franken had with a guest on his Air America radio show in 2006 in which Franken joked about the propriety of consuming Eucharistic communion wafers and wine in a manner similar to guacamole and chips.

"He mocks the Host, comparing it to snack food," Gottwalt said.

Franken has said he's not proud of every joke he's ever told, said Colleen Murray, campaign spokeswoman.

"But if Norm Coleman wants to make this about character, he should look in the mirror since (Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington) recently named him one of the four most corrupt senators in Washington for his ties to Republican insiders," she said in a statement. "Minnesotans deserve better than someone who puts the corrupt special interests ahead of voters, that's why Al Franken is focused on his bold plans to help the middle class."

The news conference was one of several held Wednesday around Minnesota by "Catholics for Coleman" groups, Ek said.

Ek and Gottwalt, who is a former spokesman for the St. Cloud diocese, said they were not speaking for the Catholic Church.

#### Offense taken

For Mary Theresa Anderson of St. Cloud, a satire in Franken's 1999 book "Why Not Me?" was disturbing. He wrote about a fictional former President Al Franken discovering "the complete skeleton of Jesus Christ still nailed to the cross."

"That's more than just a joke. That's offensive," she said. "And there's no reason for me to think that this is not still his attitude."

Anderson said she was also offended by a derogatory reference made to the late New York Cardinal John Joseph O'Connor in his 1996 book, "Rush Limbaugh is a Big Fat Idiot."

The statements may have been made before Franken's candidacy, but that's no reason to excuse them, Gottwalt said.

There's a difference between joking about religion and mocking it, and as a comedian, Franken should have known better, he said.

"It's more than that. It's his profession. It's what he does for a living," Gottwalt said. "We don't give anyone else a pass on their past."

#### Political effects

The duo also called for Franken to return \$2,300 in contributions from fellow comedian Bill Maher, who regularly ridicules religion of all kinds and has said several controversial things about the Catholic faith.

Murray said Coleman should beware of casting the first stone when it comes to campaign contributors.

"If Norm Coleman wants to make this about sitting on donations, maybe he should look a little closer to home," she said in a statement. "He's refused to return money from oil executives convicted of bribing elected officials on the very (indicted Alaska Republican Senator) Ted Stevens junkets that Norm Coleman attended. And for what it's worth, he won't return the money from Ted Stevens either."

Despite the personal feelings involved, Wednesday's news conference was about the Nov. 4 election and influencing voters, Gottwalt acknowledged.

"I hope there are Catholic Democrats out there who will wrestle with the idea that they should support the Democratic candidate," he said. "At least they should do it with their eyes open."



## Catholics for Coleman

David Schwab, WDAZ-TV Grand Forks, Published Wednesday, September 24, 2008

CROOKSTON - Some area Catholics are calling Democratic Senate candidate Al Franken a "religious bigot." They say comments Franken has used in past comic routines go too far.

Wednesday in Crookston, Catholics Ron Ogaard and Bryan Boll said Franken has mocked the Catholic confession, the church's anti-abortion position, and past popes. They say the comments may have been used in comedy, but also may reflect Franken's real views.

"If he would retract those statements, and say 'that's not how I feel, that was done as a comic routine,' but that's not what happened," said Boll.

Franken's office responded to Wednesday's comments. The group and their message is backed by his challenger, Norm Coleman. And it shows just how out of touch Coleman is with the middle class and should focus on issues like the financial markets in crisis, gas prices, and healthcare.



### *Letter To The Editor*

## **Your View: Franken distasteful**

By Robert Pierret, Mankato

Minnesotans have many reasons to be skeptical of Al Franken.

We are all aware of his pornographic writings that defy good taste and decency. His pointless jokes about rape and child abuse add nothing to the public discourse. His angry personal attacks on his political opponents debase our political life.

As a person of faith, I'm outraged at Franken's ongoing attacks over the years on Catholicism, its beliefs and its religious leaders. It is not only without humor, but borders on the kind of religious bigotry that should not go unchallenged.

To cite a few examples from his books, his radio show and the Washington Post:

Franken has called the Catholic Church's position on the protection of life and human embryos "idiotic."

He demeans the Catholic rite of Holy Communion, defiling the sacred belief of the body of Christ being shared with the community of Christ.

Franken's mocking of the communion host that represents the living body of Christ as something that is merely a potato chip to be consumed as a snack, violates deeply the very core of our deep respect for Communion.

Franken treats confession as a joke. He wrote a skit pretending that a dog is confessing to his priest — and expresses his disdain for the church's teaching on abortion.

Franken mocks the Pope. And, he even believes that it is funny to joke about selling pieces of the skeleton of Christ at a make-believe gift store.

Franken has proved that he doesn't represent Catholics and people of faith, and in doing so, has proven he should not represent the state of Minnesota.