

The following is a letter I recently sent
to Father John Jenkins, C.S.C., president of Notre Dame University.



Office of the Bishop
DIOCESE OF BAKER

PO BOX 5999 - BEND, OREGON 97708

PHONE—[541]388-4004
FAX—[541]388-2566
www.dioceseofbaker.org

May 25, 2016

Reverend John Jenkins, C.S.C.
President, University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556

Dear Father Jenkins,

Grace to you and peace.

In 2009 I called your office from the parish where I was then pastor to register my objection to your choice of President Obama as Notre Dame's commencement speaker that spring. It was extremely disheartening to watch America's premier Catholic university deliberately distance itself from the settled position of America's bishops and offer so prominent a platform to a president whose anti-life agenda emphatically opposed Catholic teaching. The gratuitous decision to present him an honorary degree brought dishonor on Notre Dame's reputation and diminished its institutional credibility as a defender of the dignity of life.

Seven years later I write as bishop to object to your equally disheartening decision to confer Notre Dame's prestigious Laetare Award on Vice-President Joseph Biden this spring, thereby officially recognizing him as one whose life has "illustrated the ideals of the Church." Instead, as the word *laetare* suggests, your choice of this honoree invites your students to "rejoice" in the Vice-President's decades-long evolution away from a recognizably Catholic conscience. For Mr. Biden vigorously supports legal abortion, mandatory insurance coverage of contraception, embryonic stem-cell research, and the redefinition of marriage. In taking these positions he has for some time knowingly and publicly separated himself from fundamental social justice teachings of the Catholic Church and aligned himself with those who seek to override the authority of Christian conscience, both personal and institutional. As Notre Dame has itself discovered in being forced to seek legal redress against the HHS contraceptive mandates, the trajectory of the sexual revolution which the Vice-President upholds puts our religious liberty very much at risk. Yet Mr. Biden continues to claim adherence to the Catholic faith which his political career has done so much to undermine. With the Laetare Medal your university singles out that career as a model for young Catholics to emulate.

In 2009 there was no public pressure on Notre Dame to honor the nation's most pro-abortion president; nor have you been pressed to give center stage to his equally pro-abortion vice-president in 2016. Because we look to South Bend for clear and well-grounded witness to the Gospel of Life in all its saving dimensions, admirers of Notre Dame have been filled with dismay by these gratuitous concessions to the new orthodoxy of secularism which obscure the uplifting clarity of the truth that sets us free.

I did not have the good fortune to attend Notre Dame University, Father Jenkins; but I have long been nourished from afar by the scholarship produced there, including scholarship on the unprecedented threat to religious liberty from menacing, militant secularism. I pray you will take that learned instruction to heart as you deliberate future decisions whose moral consequences reverberate far beyond your campus in South Bend.

In the Mother of God's Son,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Liam Cary".

Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker