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Catholic Action Network for Social Justice

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ST. LOUIS REVIEW REFUSES AD CALLING FOR DIALOGUE

Church newspaper closes off avenue to reach Catholics in St. Louis

Jim Rygelski, the editor of the *St. Louis Review*, met with four members of the Catholic Action Network for Social Justice (CAN) on Monday 28 July 2008 and discussed the advertisement they had brought to him for publication in the *Review*. *The St. Louis Review* is the official Catholic newspaper of the Archdiocese of St. Louis.

The advertisement, signed by hundreds of Catholics in St. Louis, calls on Church officials to engage in dialogue with members of the laity and to promote the full participation of women in all ministries of the Church. (A copy of the ad's language and a current list of signatories is available online: <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/weareone/>)

The four CAN members who met with Rygelski were Megan Heeney, Marie Andrews, Seán Collins, and Bill Ramsey.

"Rygelski's initial response was 'no' and his final response was 'no.' But in between was an hour-and-a-half of discussion on the beliefs, practices, polity, and history of the Catholic Church," said Bill Ramsey. "After saying his final answer was 'no,' Rygelski said he would discuss it with Bishop Hermann."

Bishop Robert Hermann, elected by a group of priests to be the Archdiocesan Administrator following the transfer of Archbishop Raymond Burke to the Apostolic Signatura in Rome, is functioning as publisher of the *Review*. An hour before their meeting with Rygelski, the CAN members left a copy of the ad for Bishop Hermann at the Chancery after attempting to meet with the Bishop.

In his weekly column in the August 1 edition of the *Review*, Bishop Hermann chose to write about obedience this week. (The full text of Bishop Hermann's column can be found online: <http://www.stlreview.com/article.php?id=15771>)

"What dissenters to Catholic teaching do not realize is that their disobedience causes them to be angry at themselves for being angry at the Church," write Hermann. "They mistakenly believe that they will be happy if the Church obeys their demands. They think that the problem is on the outside of themselves, rather than within themselves."

"I am increasingly impressed with the Roman hierarchs' mind-reading abilities," said Collins, one of the four CAN members who presented the ad for publication. "Bishop Hermann, like his predecessor Archbishop Burke, seems unfortunately comfortable ascribing motives and ideas to people with whom he refuses to meet."

"The people who speak out at times of change may be at peace and be angry," says Marie Andrews. "These are not conflicting emotions. Speaking out during times of change requires hope. As Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote: *Hope has two beautiful daughters. Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.*"

"A growing number of Catholics in St. Louis and across the globe are questioning the methods of the bishops," says Megan Heeney. "We wonder if they don't exhibit a fundamental detachment from the realities of the lives of Catholic Christians."

Collins adds, "When Bishop Hermann writes, 'everything that my superiors asked me to do has brought me incredible satisfaction, peace, joy and fulfillment. It is more fun "to listen to the Word" than to rebel against it' one has to question the spiritual and psychological maturity that underlies that notion of obedience. Some in the Church continue to extol the virtues of infantilism, a perpetual child-like posture that "Father knows best" and our role, as Catholics, to pray, pay, and obey."

"There are serious issues facing the Church globally and locally. It's time the bishops took seriously their responsibility to be ministers of unity," says Collins. "It's not enough for them to lay down the law and expect well-educated, well-meaning, well-equipped members of the Church to toe the line. Lay women and men are integral members of this Church, though they are effectively ignored in decision-making."

CAN believes a growing number of Catholics agree that the laity should have a greater voice in Church decision-making. But the organization will have to find other ways to reach Catholics in St. Louis, since the archdiocesan newspaper is not an available avenue.

"It was clear to the four of us that Jim Rygelski struggled with this decision. He seemed genuinely interested in engaging us on the place of dialogue in our Church," Collins said. "And he was weighing the values of journalism alongside his responsibilities as the editor of a 'company paper.' We respect that effort. We wish the bishops could show the same."

In a follow-up e-mail to Megan Heeney dated August 1, Rygelski addressed the tension: "As editor of the *Review*, I've always striven to make it a real newspaper, but a newspaper that's always faithful to the teachings of the Church and does all it can to explain those beliefs to its readers."

Megan Heeney says, "CAN would like nothing more than for the Church to organize real forums for dialogue where the faithful could hear from one another what the Spirit of God is saying in our midst."