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Philadelphia's Smoking Gun

Michael Sean Winters | Mar. 12, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

A local television news station in Philadelphia has obtained a document [1]that appears to be a form used to prevent any archdiocesan officials from reporting sex abuse by clergy to civil authorities. The document, which is dated 10/03, was apparently crafted more than a year after the Dallas norms were adopted. Those norms not only required church officials to report criminal acts, but required them to inform victims of their rights under civil law. This document flies in the face of those Dallas norms.
Later today, SNAP is planning a protest outside the Cathedral in Philadelphia that will call attention to this new document, the likes of which they say they have never seen before. According to press release from SNAP:
"The one-page form, titled ?Prohibition to Release Information ? pertaining to reported sexual abuse by clergy, other religious and lay employees,? appears to have been created in October 2003, more than a year after America?s bishops adopted a national abuse policy that mandates ?openness and transparency? in child sex cases.

It prevents archdiocesan employees from ?relating to the appropriate law enforcement authorities. . .any information about alleged sexual abuse by an official or employee of the archdiocese.? There?s space at the bottom for victims (or parents of child victims) to sign. There is no space for a signature by any church staffer.

The group says that often, church officials claim to take actions that allegedly protect victims when, in fact, the real intent and effect is to protect archdiocesan staffers and secrets.

In 23 years, SNAP has never seen another Catholic entity ? either diocese, school, college, or religious order ? that uses or has used such a form."

Cardinal Rigali was installed as the Archbishop of Philadelphia that same month, October, 2003, and was created a cardinal that same month as well. So, there is no way to know if this document was created under his tenure or that of his predecessor. But, again, the problem in Philadelphia is not a problem of a one errant hierarch. The problem is a culture of clericalism.

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Links:
[1] http://www.myfoxphilly.com/dpp/news/local_news/031111-mystery-document-appears-in-priest-probe