

Dear Fr. Jenkins,

My name is Fr. John J. Raphael, SSJ. I am a member of ND's graduating class of 1989. I am currently the principal of St. Augustine High School in New Orleans, LA and a member of Notre Dame's Admissions Advisory Board.

I am writing to express my extreme disappointment and grave disapproval of the decision to invite President Obama to give the commencement address and to receive an honorary degree from Notre Dame at this year's graduation.

I have spent eighteen years working with blacks and whites, Protestants and Catholics, to bring more African Americans into the pro-life movement. During the last two months the Obama administration has already begun to aggressively roll back the gains made in defense of life over the course of the last fifteen years.

I have written two articles which attempt to show how the historical significance of the first African American president is emptied of its meaning if this same president refuses to embrace the rights of the unborn. I share them with you if you are interested in considering the devastating impact of these pro-abortion policies on the African American community in light of this historic election:

[Building a Bridge over Troubled Waters](#)

[Symbol and Substance in Inauguration, life march](#)

As an African American and a priest, as a principal of a Catholic high school and a member of the Admissions Advisory Board of the university, I cannot adequately express in words how deeply this action offends those who are committed to carrying out the task of Catholic education and witnessing to the Gospel of Life in the context of a Catholic school. Even if the university chooses to cooperate with certain policies of the president that are not contrary to the teaching of the faith, the conferral of this type of public honor is wholly gratuitous and incongruous with the mission of any Catholic institution

On this Laetare Sunday, I was happy to note this year's recipient of the Laetare Medal, Mary Ann Glendon, has eloquently and courageously served the nation and more importantly, the Church. How strange it is that at the same time the University chooses to publicly honor an administration with which the American Catholic bishops have already had to address major concerns about the lack of protection of the rights of the unborn in just two months.

Today's first reading from the book of Chronicles speaks as much to us today as it did to Israel during the Babylonian exile:

*In those days, all the princes of Judah, the priests, and the people
added infidelity to infidelity,
practicing all the abominations of the nations
and polluting the LORD's temple*

which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.

*Early and often did the LORD, the God of their fathers,
send his messengers to them,
for he had compassion on his people and his dwelling place.
But they mocked the messengers of God,
despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets,
until the anger of the LORD against his people was so inflamed
that there was no remedy (2Chr 36:14ff).*

The voice of Notre Dame needs to be raised in defense of the unborn. The African American community in particular is being decimated by abortion on demand as currently supported by the Obama administration. Our Holy Father, mocked and despised by many in popular culture, has called upon all faith Christians to courageously bear witness to life.

By conferring this "honor" upon President Obama at this time, the University of Notre Dame muddies the waters of life and darkens the light in which we are called to walk.

Sincerely in Notre Dame, the Mother of Life,

Rev. John J. Raphael, SSJ, '89
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