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## Watchdog group is taking up arms against the sea of anti-Catholicism



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BY LEE STRONG, SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Chuck and Susan Baker found themselves facing a formidable foe five years ago.

The Bakers were the target of an American Civil Liberties Union-backed lawsuit stemming from their refusal to print membership cards for members of Vermont Catholics for a Free Choice.

As devout Catholics, the Bakers believed they could not, in good conscience, allow the company they own, Regal Arts Press, to print such materials for a pro-choice organization.

Linda Paquette of Vermont Catholics for a Free Choice promptly sued the Bakers, claiming she was being discriminated against because of her religious beliefs. The Bakers countered with a suit of their own, citing their First Amendment rights to free speech.

As a result of the suits, the Bakers faced the prospect of paying potentially large legal bills.

That's when the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights got involved.

"We had quite a few bills in the beginning," Chuck Baker recalled during a recent interview. "But the Catholic League came in and helped with a local attorney."

The League assisted with some of the bills and with preparing the case early on, until other assistance for the Bakers began to materialize. In addition, Chuck Baker said, "Two to three thousand postcards came from League members with support for us."

The suit was finally settled in late March of this year when the Vermont Supreme Court upheld the Bakers' right to refuse the work on the basis of their religious beliefs.

"We never could have done this on our own, not

against the ACLU," Baker said. "(The League does) a lot of good work."

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has been providing such work and assistance since May 12, 1973, when it was founded in Washington, D.C. by the late Father Virgil C. Blum, SJ, and 24 other Catholics. The group established the Catholic civil rights and anti-defamation organization out of fear of growing anti-Catholic attitudes in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe vs. Wade* decision that effectively legalized abortion in the United States.

Over the years, the organization has drawn public attention to attacks against religious liberties and on the Catholic Church by the media, by various organizations, in the arts, in education and in the workplace.

Among its more recent efforts was a boycott of Disney over the movie "Priest." The League also joined an ecumenical coalition in filing a brief supporting the First Amendment rights of students at the University of Virginia to use student activity fees to publish a Christian journal. The Supreme Court ruled June 29 in favor of those students.

The League has also been involved in cases ranging from supporting a Georgia police officer who was suspended from his job last year for refusing to remove ashes from his forehead on Ash Wednesday, to helping two Catholic landlords in Boston last year win a five-year-old case involving their refusal, on religious grounds, to rent an apartment to an unwed couple.

Beyond its involvement with such cases, the League has conducted surveys of American Catholics; sponsored controversial anti-condom billboard and subway advertising campaigns that ran in New York and Boston; and defended Pope Pius XII against charges that he did nothing to stop the Holocaust.

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