

Lawyer charges Catholic University with violations

Josef Kuhn Religion News Service | Oct. 28, 2011

WASHINGTON -- A famously litigious lawyer has filed charges against the Catholic University of America (CUA) for not providing Muslim students with prayer rooms that are free of Catholic iconography.

John F. Banzhaf III, a law professor at George Washington University who had earlier filed charges over CUA's switch to same-sex dorms this summer, filed the new 60-page complaint with the Washington, D.C. Office of Human Rights.

"It shouldn't be too difficult somewhere on the campus for the university to set aside a small room where Muslims can pray without having to stare up and be looked down upon by a cross of Jesus," Banzhaf told Fox News.

Banzhaf complained that CUA does not sponsor a Muslim student association, even though it sponsors a Jewish one. He also claimed the single-sex dorm policy discriminates against female students.

The university, whose Arab student population swelled from 56 in 2007 to 122 this year, sponsors an Arab American Association, founded this fall by Muslim student Wiaam Al Salmi.

"The community here is very respectful of other religions and I feel free to openly practice it," Salmi told the CUA student newspaper, *The Tower*.

CUA President John H. Garvey told NPR in 2010 that Muslim students are attracted to the campus because "their own faith practices are mirrored by our own. And they feel both welcome and understood at the campus."

The Office of Human Rights has begun an investigation of the university, which could take as long as six months.

"No students have registered complaints about the exercise of their religions on our campus," a CUA spokesman said Thursday (Oct. 27). "We have not seen any legal filing -- and will respond to (any allegations) if we do."

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