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SNAP, Catholic League leaders talk abuse scandal on radio show

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Dave Clohessy and Bill Donohue, leaders of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and the Catholic League, were interviewed back-to-back Friday morning on a popular St. Louis news-radio show, giving opposite viewpoints on the U.S. clergy sex abuse scandal.

The interviews, part of The Charlie Brennan Show on St. Louis' KMOX station, came one day after it was revealed that SNAP had received a subpoena from lawyers representing the St. Louis archdiocese to submit for deposition in the case of a priest accused of sexual abuse there.

The subpoena is the second SNAP has received so far. Clohessy submitted himself for deposition Monday in a case involving a Kansas City, Mo., priest accused of abuse.

As part of both orders, SNAP has been requested to turn over internal records, correspondence and email dating back 23 years.

Saying his organization had spent more than 300 man-hours deciding how to respond to the legal moves since news of the Kansas City subpoena, Clohessy said the moves by lawyers defending priests accused of abuse will lead to people being "increasingly afraid" to expose priests who might be abusing children.

But Donohue said incidents of sexual abuse are "in the past" -- a product of the sexual revolution -- and that the Catholic church protects children better than any other faith institution.

Asked by the host whether SNAP was concerned that the subpoenas could represent a "new tactic" that might bankrupt the organization, Clohessy said they were "less concerned about the money."

"We're concerned much more about this 19-year-old girl in St. Louis," Clohessy said, referring to the woman's allegations that she was abused by archdiocesan priest Fr. Joseph Ross from the time she was 4 or 5 years old.

"And now [St. Louis Archbishop Robert] Carlson wants to get her records and expose her to the public. With moves like this," he said, "people are now increasingly afraid to speak up and expose predators."

Referring to reports that the diocese of Belleville, Ill., was facing financial insolvency because of abuse settlements, Brennan asked Clohessy whether it was fair to say that SNAP was "putting dioceses out of business."

Clohessy said SNAP had not been a party to any of the lawsuits against accused priests or dioceses and that it was difficult to evaluate what effect abuse lawsuits are having on church coffers because "church officials are just as secretive with their financials as they are with pedophile priests."

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"If a bishop will lie about a molesting cleric," Clohessy said, "he certainly will lie about his bank account as well."

Appearing after a commercial break, Donohue lambasted an editorial Thursday in *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* that called on Catholics to "think about" the "legal assault" against SNAP before giving money during the collection at their parish this Sunday.

Donohue called the paper's editorial writers "little girls."

"They're not even men," Donohue said. "A real man would come out and say don't give money to the Catholic church. What they do is just dance around it and drop it like little girls."

Donohue also criticized SNAP for "cherry-picking" which abuse cases they bring to light.

One person who called into the show asked Donohue why he doesn't talk about the fact that while SNAP may be imperfect, there have been thousands of admissions by priests that they have abused children.

Donohue replied that those incidents were "in the past." He said "it happened during the sexual revolution."

"No institution today has less of a problem with the molestation of minors than the Catholic church," he said.

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