

Cafardi resigns as Catholic university trustee after backing Obama

WASHINGTON - Following his public endorsement of Democratic presidential nominee Sen. Barack Obama, a Catholic legal scholar has resigned from the board of trustees at Ohio's Franciscan University of Steubenville.

Nicholas P. Cafardi submitted his letter of resignation Oct. 6, which was accepted by the school's president, Franciscan Father Terrance Henry, on behalf of the board, according to a statement issued by the Catholic university Oct. 7.

The resignation came a week after a Religion News Service column on Sen. Obama written by Mr. Cafardi, dean emeritus and a professor of law at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, appeared in the National Catholic Reporter. In the column he endorsed President Obama in spite of his support for legal abortion and stated, "We have lost the abortion battle - permanently."

A statement issued by Franciscan University said Cafardi's exit was voluntary. He had served on the board of trustees since 2002.

"Our president spoke with Dr. Cafardi and let him know that this was causing concern among our constituents about Franciscan University's pro-life stance," university spokesman Tom Sofio told Catholic News Service Oct. 8. "The letter of resignation arrived a few days after that conversation."

The resignation came four days after the university issued a statement that distanced the school from the legal scholar's published opinions, affirmed its own tradition of not endorsing political candidates, and vehemently disagreed that the abortion battle was lost in the U.S.

"Dr. Nicholas Cafardi's defense of Barack Obama as a moral choice for Catholics reflects his views as a private citizen, and in no way reflects the views of Franciscan University of Steubenville," the Oct. 2 statement said.

“As a Catholic university, Franciscan fosters an environment through education and activities that proclaims the sanctity of life, most notably through its Human Life Studies program and Institute of Bioethics,” it said.

“Franciscan University students take pro-life issues to heart, fighting for the end of abortion through sidewalk counseling at abortion clinics, participation in the March for Life in Washington, D.C., countless hours of prayer, and many other activities,” the statement added.

Mr. Cafardi was the second high-profile Catholic legal scholar to publicly support Sen. Obama, despite the fact that both men are pro-life advocates. The first, in September, was Douglas W. Kmiec, professor of constitutional law and holder of the Caruso Family chair in constitutional law at Pepperdine University in Malibu, Calif.

“Is that a proper moral choice for a committed Catholic?” Mr. Cafardi asked in his Sept. 30 column about his support for Obama. “As one of the inaugural members of the U.S. bishops’ National Review Board on clergy sexual abuse, and as a canon lawyer, I answer with a resounding yes.

“Despite what some Republicans would like Catholics to believe, the list of what the church calls ‘intrinsically evil acts’ does not begin and end with abortion,” he said. “In fact, there are many intrinsically evil acts, and a committed Catholic must consider all of them in deciding how to vote.”