

Omaha archbishop voices support for Creighton

OMAHA, Neb. – The relationship between the Archdiocese of Omaha and Creighton University remains strong, despite some media accounts that called the cancellation of a speaker at Creighton part of a “growing rift” between the university and the archdiocese.

“I would like to reiterate, in view of recent events, that the Archdiocese of Omaha and Creighton University have an excellent working relationship,” said Omaha Archbishop Elden F. Curtiss Aug. 30 in a statement to the media. “I am supportive personally of (Creighton president Jesuit) Father John Schlegel and the mission of the university.”

The recent events to which the archbishop referred revolved around Creighton’s decision to cancel a speech by best-selling author Anne Lamott as part of a women’s health lecture series sponsored by the Center for Health, Policy and Ethics at the Creighton University Medical Center.

University officials withdrew the invitation when they learned that in a book published this spring Lamott wrote about helping a friend with cancer die. She also is an advocate of keeping abortion legal.

Father Schlegel told university faculty and staff Aug. 29 that “incomplete accounts of what has transpired may be clouding” the discussion. He said he made the decision to cancel the talk Aug. 24 after “prayerful reflection upon reading her (Lamott’s) latest book.”

“The decision to cancel the lecture was not the result of outside pressure from any group,” he said.

“I appreciate the decision that Father Schlegel made about the Anne Lamott lecture,” Archbishop Curtiss said in his statement. “It was in keeping with the mission of the university and supportive of the teaching mission of the church.”

Creighton officials said the speech invitation was withdrawn because some of Lamott’s views were not in line with Catholic teachings.

While voicing commitment to the principle of academic freedom in his comments to the faculty and staff, Father Schlegel said consideration of the Lamott speech moved from “the issue of academic freedom to sponsorship.”

“In the case of a sponsored lecture where the speaker is to be compensated and expenses paid, the lecture unavoidably and plainly takes on the imprimatur of the university,” he said. “Context becomes vastly more important.”

Father Schlegel said he respects Lamott’s right to express her views and admires her frankness, but “her views are so clearly in opposition to the sacredness of life from conception to natural death that I could not in good conscience allow the university to place its imprimatur on her lecture.”

The Creighton president told the Omaha World-Herald newspaper that Creighton officials will be reviewing university policies on the speakers invited to Creighton’s campus. To be addressed are formats for speakers, including ways that will provide balance and the discussion of other viewpoints.

After the Lamott speech was canceled at Creighton, an Omaha coalition of six Protestant churches joined together to bring Lamott to Omaha Sept. 19 – the same day her talk was planned at Creighton.