

Jenkins speaks out on 'Monologues'

The following statement was issued Monday by the Rev. John I. Jenkins, president of the University of Notre Dame, regarding the upcoming campus performances of "The Vagina Monologues":

In the spring of 2006, prompted by recurring performances of "The Vagina Monologues" on campus, I made a speech to the Notre Dame family that launched a 10-week-long, communitywide discussion about the presentation of controversial events at Notre Dame. At the end of that exchange, I drew several conclusions, which were shared by department chairs in the College of Arts and Letters and expressed in "The Common Proposal of the Chairs of Arts and Letters and Fr. Jenkins." Among these are the following:

■ First, it is part of the role of a university to foster free and open discussion of controversial issues.

■ Second, it is the responsibility of all involved in sponsoring a controversial event to ensure that the presentation has academic merit, multiple viewpoints are heard, appropriate balance

among these is maintained, and reasoned and respectful exchange — the hallmark of a genuine university — is fostered.

■ Third, those sponsoring an event must make clear that their sponsorship is not an endorsement of the views presented, and any language or actions suggesting such endorsement must be avoided.

■ Finally, when a significant issue of Catholic teaching is touched on, it is incumbent on us as a Catholic university to ensure that a knowledgeable presentation of Catholic teaching is included.

Recently a student proposal for the performance of "The Vagina Monologues" was approved by several academic departments and received by the dean of the College of Arts and Letters. The dean has approved a final proposal and, after reviewing it, I am satisfied that the principles of



Jenkins

the "Common Proposal" are being applied.

In particular, after each performance and as part of each academic panel, at least one of the panelists will offer a thorough and sympathetic account of the Catholic tradition in relation to the issues raised in the play. Performances of the play, which will take place in an academic setting, will occur from March 24 to 26.

I am well aware that the performance of this play will upset many. It is particularly painful for me that Bishop John D'Arcy — for whom I have great respect and affection — disapproves of my decision. It also pains me to know it will disappoint some very loyal members of the Notre Dame family — alumni who are deeply committed to the Catholic identity of Notre Dame who see the performance of this play on campus as contrary to our Catholic mission.

At the same time, others are upset at the restrictions on this performance — that there will be no fundraising, that a panel must follow each play and include a sympathetic and thorough presentation of Catholic teaching.

My decision on this matter arises from a conviction that it is an indispensable part of the mission of a Catholic university to provide a forum in which multiple viewpoints are debated in reasoned and respectful exchange — always in dialogue with faith and the Catholic tradition — even around highly controversial topics.

Notre Dame's policy on controversial events rests on the conviction that truth will emerge from reasoned consideration of issues in dialogue with faith, and that we will educate Catholic leaders not by insulating our students from controversial views, but by engaging these views energetically, in light of Catholic teachings.

While I know the decision is likely to disappoint many, and perhaps satisfy no one fully, it is, in my judgment, the action that best serves the distinctive mission of Notre Dame.