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Leo W. Gerard
International President

December 19, 2013

Sent via fax (39-066-988-5373) and Regular Mail

His Holiness The Pope Francis
Vatican City State, 00120

Your Holiness:

First, I wish to extend my most heartfelt feeling of respect to you as the new Pontiff of the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

I am the President of the United Steelworkers union ("USW") the largest industrial union in the United States and Canada. We have been closely following your Papacy and must say that we are very excited about the message of social justice which you are promulgating. We were very interested in your statements in the Sardinian capital, Cagliari, where you decried the current economic system which is based on a "god called money," and where you criticized the global economic system which does us such harm. In truth, this has been the message of the USW and the North American labor movement for many decades.

In this same speech, you lament the current "throwaway culture" in which "we throw away grandparents, and we throw away young people." We lament this culture too. And indeed, these words call to mind a recent incident here in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in which an 83-year-old adjunct professor, with 25 years of service, was unceremoniously cast aside by Duquesne University, a Catholic university. Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit is not merely a Catholic university, but is indeed a symbol of the Church to Catholics and non-Catholics here in Pittsburgh. I am enclosing an opinion piece on this tragic story of this adjunct, Margaret Mary Vojtko, written by Daniel Kovalik, the USW's Senior Associate General Counsel.

Sadly, this same Catholic university has been resisting unionization of its adjunct faculty for over a year. And, quite shockingly, it is doing so by invoking the Catholic faith itself as an impediment to unionization. What is even more baffling, is that Duquesne raised this defense after it had already signed a contract in which it consented to a representation election for the adjuncts and in which it agreed to honor the outcome of such an election. At least two other universities in the U.S. (St. Xavier in Chicago, Manhattan College and Seattle University) have raised the same defense. This, despite the fact that other Catholic universities like Georgetown University – which, along with Notre Dame, is the most prestigious Catholic university in America — have readily

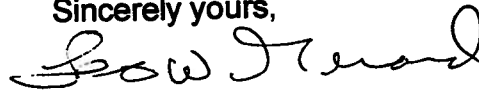
accepted unionization based on Catholic social teaching. It should be noted that, nationwide, adjunct faculty make up about 75% of the faculty of colleges and universities, and they have no job security, earn poverty wages (of about \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year), and generally are afforded no benefits. That is why unionization is so critical for them.

Who knows what may have happened with Margaret Mary if Duquesne had originally lived up to its contractual commitment over a year ago to honor the results of the union election in which the vast majority of adjuncts voted to be represented by the USW. Sadly, we will never know.

However, we are writing today to respectfully ask that you consider speaking out on this issue, and specifically to Duquesne University itself, on what Catholic social teaching says about the duty of Catholic universities and colleges to honor the wishes of its employees, including adjunct faculty, to unionize.

We thank you so much for your consideration in this regard.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leo W. Gerard". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "G".

Leo W. Gerard
International President

Death of an adjunct

September 18, 2013 12:06 am

By Daniel Kovalik /

On Sept. 1, Margaret Mary Vojtko, an adjunct professor who had taught French at Duquesne University for 25 years, passed away at the age of 83. She died as the result of a massive heart attack she suffered two weeks before. As it turned out, I may have been the last person she talked to.

On Aug. 16, I received a call from a very upset Margaret Mary. She told me that she was under an incredible amount of stress. She was receiving radiation therapy for the cancer that had just returned to her, she was living nearly homeless because she could not afford the upkeep on her home, which was literally falling in on itself, and now, she explained, she had received another indignity -- a letter from Adult Protective Services telling her that someone had referred her case to them saying that she needed assistance in taking care of herself. The letter said that if she did not meet with the caseworker the following Monday, her case would be turned over to Orphans' Court.

For a proud professional like Margaret Mary, this was the last straw; she was mortified. She begged me to call Adult Protective Services and tell them to leave her alone, that she could take care of herself and did not need their help. I agreed to. Sadly, a couple of hours later, she was found on her front lawn, unconscious from a heart attack. She never regained consciousness.

Meanwhile, I called Adult Protective Services right after talking to Margaret Mary, and I explained the situation. I said that she had just been let go from her job as a professor at Duquesne, that she was given no severance or retirement benefits, and that the reason she was having trouble taking care of herself was because she was living in extreme poverty. The caseworker paused and asked with incredulity, "She was a professor?" I said yes. The caseworker was shocked; this was not the usual type of person for whom she was called in to help.

Of course, what the caseworker didn't understand was that Margaret Mary was an adjunct professor, meaning that, unlike a well-paid tenured professor, Margaret Mary worked on a contract basis from semester to semester, with no job security, no benefits

and with a salary of between \$3,000 and just over \$3,500 per three-credit course. Adjuncts now make up well over 50 percent of the faculty at colleges and universities.

While adjuncts at Duquesne overwhelmingly voted to join the United Steelworkers union a year ago, Duquesne has fought unionization, claiming that it should have a religious exemption. Duquesne has claimed that the unionization of adjuncts like Margaret Mary would somehow interfere with its mission to inculcate Catholic values among its students.

This would be news to Georgetown University -- one of only two Catholic universities to make U.S. News & World Report's list of top 25 universities -- which just recognized its adjunct professors' union, citing the Catholic Church's social justice teachings, which favor labor unions.

As amazing as it sounds, Margaret Mary, a 25-year professor, was not making ends meet. Even during the best of times, when she was teaching three classes a semester and two during the summer, she was not even clearing \$25,000 a year, and she received absolutely no health care benefits. Compare this with the salary of Duquesne's president, who makes more than \$700,000 with full benefits.

Meanwhile, in the past year, her teaching load had been reduced by the university to one class a semester, which meant she was making well below \$10,000 a year. With huge out-of-pocket bills from UPMC Mercy for her cancer treatment, Margaret Mary was left in abject penury. She could no longer keep her electricity on in her home, which became uninhabitable during the winter. She therefore took to working at an Eat'n Park at night and then trying to catch some sleep during the day at her office at Duquesne. When this was discovered by the university, the police were called in to eject her from her office. Still, despite her cancer and her poverty, she never missed a day of class.

Finally, in the spring, she was let go by the university, which told her she was no longer effective as an instructor -- despite many glowing evaluations from students. She came to me to seek legal help to try to save her job. She said that all she wanted was money to pay her medical bills because Duquesne, which never paid her much to begin with, gave her nothing on her way out the door.

Duquesne knew all about Margaret Mary's plight, for I apprised them of it in two letters. I never received a reply, and Margaret Mary was forced to die saddened, penniless and on the verge of being turned over to Orphan's Court.

The funeral Mass for Margaret Mary, a devout Catholic, was held at Epiphany Church, only a few blocks from Duquesne. The priest who said Mass was from the University of Dayton, another Catholic university and my alma mater. Margaret Mary was laid out in a simple, cardboard casket devoid of any handles for pallbearers -- a sad sight, but an honest symbol of what she had been reduced to by her ostensibly Catholic employer.

Her nephew, who had contacted me about her passing, implored me to make sure that she didn't die in vain. He said that while there was nothing that could be done for Margaret Mary, we had to help the other adjuncts at Duquesne and other universities who were being treated just as she was, and who could end up just like she did. I believe that writing this story is the first step in doing just that.

Daniel Kovalik is senior associate general counsel of the United Steelworkers union (DKovalik@usw.org).

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