



Church parishioner claims pastor humiliated her over Obama signs

By Ryan Chalk
MediaNews staff

Updated: 11/13/2008 11:48:29 AM PST

FAIRFIELD — A Fairfield woman whose car was adorned with celebratory signs for President-elect Barack Obama is furious that a priest singled her out during Sunday morning Mass and ordered her to leave.

Elizabeth Caster admits her Toyota Sequoia was parked in a loading zone outside of the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Fairfield, but said it was common practice by parishioners during services and that two other vehicles parked on either side of her vehicle were not addressed.

Caster said the Rev. Sebastian Meyer humiliated her in front of the congregation, saying from the pulpit, "We cannot have a car with Obama signs written on it on these premises. And I don't care who Obama is."

He continued, "I want this car off the premises in 10 minutes or it will be towed. Whoever's vehicle this is, I want it removed. I don't want to see that car anywhere around here," she said.

The Rev. Meyer did not return calls. An attempt to speak to him face to face ended abruptly Wednesday morning when he announced, "No, we're not writing that," and attempted to snatch a reporter's notebook away.

Caster said the priest followed her and her 10-year-old son out of the church and refused to let her park anywhere in the parking lot.

She had to come back after the service to pick up her parents, who were visiting from Kenya.

Caster, who was contacted by many concerned church members the next day, said she believes it was the Obama slogans that riled the priest.

Among those who witnessed the incident was Joanne Smith, who said she has seen vehicles parked in the yellow zone with signage for the McCain/Palin campaign and is curious as to why Caster's vehicle was singled out.

Smith, who regularly attends a different church but brought her father to the Mount Carmel church for Mass on Sunday, said she has witnessed outbursts by the Rev. Meyer before, but never like this.

"He got up there and he was pounding on the pulpit. He was pounding and he was angry," Smith said. "This was the worst I've ever seen."

Caster's husband, Joe, had stayed home that morning because he was feeling ill. He was outraged when she called to tell him about it.

"Her right to free speech was violated," he said.

The Casters say they have given \$25 a week to the church for the past six years, but that has come to an end.

"We're not going back to that church and we've already pulled our son out of his Catholic Christian Doctrine classes. We're not going to let somebody tell us we can't celebrate," said Joe Caster.

Peggy Sherrod, a parishioner since 1989 who teaches a religious study session to sixth-graders, also witnessed the incident and said it made her sad.

Advertisement

insideBayArea.com **(800) 755-7323**

Subscribe today!
www.insidebayarea.com/services

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™



"It took a lot out of me to sit there and not walk out," said Sherrod.

She has since forgiven the pastor, she said, but noted a definite tone in his voice.

"It was something to the effect of, I don't care who Obama is, he won, get over it," she said. "It seems there was some anger and animosity in his tone. You could feel the Holy Spirit sucked out of the church."

Kevin Eckery, spokesman for the Sacramento Diocese, which oversees Catholic churches in the region, said the priest told him that he was merely concerned with an illegally parked vehicle that was partially blocking access to the church.

Eckery said the Rev. Meyer admitted that he came down from the pulpit to make the announcement and only referenced the Obama writing so that its owner could identify it. The priest also told Eckery that he did not follow Caster outside and denied making any disparaging remarks.

"The congregation and Father Sebastian are very sorry for any misunderstanding and there certainly was no intent to say anything bad about our president-elect," said Eckery.

Advertisement



(800) 755-7323

Subscribe today!

www.insidebayarea.com/services



Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™