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## St. Francis Prep School Was not Amused

By NICK DIVITO

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BROOKLYN (CN) - A teacher claims in a federal lawsuit that a Catholic prep school fired her for creating a social website called "Burn and Rot in Hell!"

Elizabeth Cucinotta Sorvillo sued St. Francis Preparatory School, the Franciscan Brothers of Brooklyn, the school principal Brother Leonard Conway, and the school board.

Sorvillo, who taught business at the school from 2007-2011, says in the complaint that she wanted the website to "be a place where people could vent about anything that bothers them and get things off their chest." She says she decided on the name "Burn and rot in hell!" as a joke "because that's what her spouse used to say in jest when she was angry about something."

Sorvillo claims the school's assistant principal and dean of women, Carolyn Szostek, "had no problem with the website concept and the name and in fact thought it was hilarious." Szostek is not a party to the complaint.

After consulting with a web designer and social media consultants, Sorvillo says, she launched her Facebook fan page in the fall of 2010. The official website, "Burn and rot in Hell!" was launched on March 20, 2011.

The school suspended Sorvillo four days later, and then fired her.

Brother Conway then circulated a letter to all students about Sorvillo's termination, according to the complaint.

The letter said, in part: "About a week ago, [a] teacher launched a website designed to allow users to complain about various people and situations in their lives. Two of the categories people could comment on were teachers and students. This teacher mentioned the website in her class and encouraged students to use it. Once we became aware of the website ... I met with the teacher and discussed with her that we found the site to be contrary to our mission and philosophy. She saw no problem with the site, chose not to take it down, and declined an opportunity to discuss the matter further. Because of her actions, she left me with no choice but to terminate her employment." (Ellipsis in complaint.)

Then, in a letter to alumni, parents, faculty members, administrators and trustees, Brother Conway wrote, "Speech is not 'free' when its purpose is to bully, to convey hatred, or to spread malicious lies and unsubstantiated rumors," according to the complaint.

A Jane Doe plaintiff also sued, claiming a teacher gave extra credit to girls who did the splits in their skirts, and a former student-plaintiff who graduated in 1986 claims a teacher punched him in the face in 1985.

Sorvillo seeks in punitive damages for defamation and negligent supervision and retention.

She and her co-plaintiffs are represented by Kevin T. Mulhearn, of Orangeburg. 



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