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Man On A Mission

The Thomas More Law Center Opens West Coast Office In San Diego

BY ROBERT KUMPEL

The Thomas More Law Center in Ann Arbor, Michigan was founded in 2000 by Thomas Monaghan, the Domino's Pizza magnate. Monaghan approached Richard Thompson, the prosecutor of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, with the idea of opening a law firm that would be distinctly Catholic in its identity and mission. Aligned with other Christian lawyers, attorneys for the More center have won victories in cases involving abortion and free speech rights for Christians. The center is currently involved in several hundred court cases throughout the country.

Attorney Charles LiMandri, 48, is the west coast regional director for the San Diego office. LiMandri, a native of this area, specializes in civil litigation for insurance and business. One of the few attorneys in San Diego who is board certified as a civil trial attorney by the National Board of Trial Advocacy, LiMandri has practiced law for more than 20 years. One of his more prestigious victories came in January when he won what was only the second punitive damage verdict -- around \$2.3 million -- in California in an insurance case involving coverage for mold-related damage.

LiMandri initially found out about the Thomas More Law Center while reading *News Notes*. "There was an article about a case the Thomas More Law Center was bringing against Planned Parenthood here in San Diego and they mentioned the name of the attorney, Pat Gillen, who was the principal lawyer for the Thomas More Law Center. I called him and told him I had a devotion to Saint Thomas More and I certainly believed in the work that they were doing and to let me know if I could be of any assistance. When [Gillen] was in San Diego, he stopped in and saw me. Through him, I was invited back to Ann Arbor and met Mr. Thompson. I eventually accepted an invitation to

be their west coast regional director. Right now, it's a part-time, pro-bono position, but, God willing, it will become more full-time.

"In Ann Arbor," LiMandri adds, "they have six full time lawyers and they're fine Christian gentlemen. They are talented, ambitious, and men of integrity, men of principle. They believe in what they are fighting for."

For his own strong faith, LiMandri credits his parents and his education. "I come from an Italian Catholic background," he says. "My parents made sure that we never missed Mass on Sunday. I had 16 years of Catholic education, which includes eight years of Catholic grade school, Saint Augustine High School, four years at USD when it was still Catholic," he laughs. "I studied the life and works of Saint Thomas More abroad at Oxford University and that really helped a lot. I went to Georgetown Law School and for two years there I had a good canon law professor. But I've always been interested in philosophy and theology and I had minors in both at USD. I've really internalized it more during the last 10 or 12 years with more devotion to the Eucharist."

LiMandri has been unofficially providing legal assistance to the Thomas More Law Center in their case against Planned Parenthood in San Diego. The case, filed on behalf of three San Diego County women, charged Planned Parenthood with violating the state's unfair competition laws and false advertising for misleading statements about the safety of abortion and its link to breast cancer. The case was dismissed when Planned Parenthood successfully argued that the lawsuit infringed on their right of free expression. The judge awarded \$77,000 in legal fees to Planned Parenthood and plaintiff's attorney, Patrick Gillen, lost his appeal to the Fourth District Court of Appeals in San Diego. He is considering an appeal to the United States Supreme Court.

The local office's first official act was to draft a brief on behalf of the Catholic League for a Supreme Court case challenging the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision rendering the use of "under God" unconstitutional when recited in the pledge of allegiance by public school children. The case is expected to be heard in a few

months.

Thomas More Law Center's mission, in LiMandri's words, is "to promote pro-life, pro-traditional family values and pro-religious freedom of Christians. Unfortunately, we are living in an anomalous time where Christians, who are still the great majority of the people, are being discriminated against in a whole host of fashions to the point where even if they profess their beliefs, it can be considered 'hate speech' and grounds for discipline or termination or, in some places, like Canada, being incarcerated. We're trying to stop that from happening in this country. We want to preserve the way of life that our founding fathers felt dearly about and fought and died for."

LiMandri estimates that he spends about 20 percent of his time on cases for the More Center. He is assisted by attorney Teresa Mendoza. When the office closes for the day, LiMandri spends his time working on issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion and the civil rights of Catholics. LiMandri also speaks to interested groups (he recently addressed the Old Mission Young Adult Group and the San Diego Legatus chapter on preserving traditional marriage) and defends the faith on the radio with Catholic Answers. "I think it's important," he explains, "to keep Catholic audiences as well-informed as possible to what the Church's position is and why it's so important to all of us."

Located in a Rancho Santa Fe business park, LiMandri's firm and the Thomas More Law Center's adjoining office exude a quiet dignity. The walls are decorated with framed copies of historic legal documents as well as etchings and paintings. Behind LiMandri's desk is a print of the famous portrait of the English saint painted by Hans Holbein the Younger. LiMandri's fellow attorneys don't seem to mind the presence of the saint as they tend to share his values. "I have five other attorneys here. None of them are hostile to my work with the Law Center, as most of them are of like mind -- some of them zealously so. Four are Catholic and the other is an evangelical."

One case LiMandri is watching closely involves new legislation in South Dakota that criminalizes abortion and

attempts to define when life begins. "That's something that *Roe v. Wade* failed to specifically address. Science has advanced to the point where we know, with reasonable medical certainty, that life begins with conception, which provided the basis for this legislation. If this passes in South Dakota, it will eventually be contested in court and end up at the United States Supreme Court."

While abortion has been the focal point of most Catholic legal efforts in recent years, LiMandri believes the culture war is now being fought on two fronts. "The issue of same-sex marriage," he says, "especially in the next election, is going to loom as large as abortion has. If we lose this battle, we could easily lose the war which is for hearts and minds. Our younger generation is being sold a bill of goods about safe sex and tolerating different lifestyles. They're not being told these lifestyles are well-known to be inherently harmful. Physicians will tell you that you should not use drugs because drugs have well-known adverse health consequences. Same-sex relationships are also that way. The average life expectancy for a homosexual male is eight to 20 years less than a heterosexual male. Homosexuals and lesbians experience a host of serious diseases that are not nearly as prevalent in the heterosexual community, including various forms of cancer. I don't mean to be crass, but we're talking about things like rectal cancer, anal gonorrhoea, a gastrointestinal condition called gay bowel syndrome. The risk of domestic abuse in the homosexual community is much larger than in the heterosexual community. I have a ton of data on this. The country that has had homosexual marriages the longest is The Netherlands. A lot of this information comes from there. People who are in 'committed' homosexual relationships have an average of eight partners per year as opposed to dozens of partners per year, the 'non-committed' homosexuals have. 'Committed', means that they are emotionally attached -- they'll come back and stay together, but not exclusively together. They'll have multiple partners and share partners. This is a lifestyle that breeds a lot of problems. The rates of drug addiction and suicide among homosexuals are just as high in these 'tolerant' countries such as The Netherlands and Germany."

"There's a case in Germany," LiMandri continues, "in which a man took out an ad on the internet, seeking a homosexual liaison where, after they were to have sex, he would kill and eat the person. In fact, he did. The defense at the trial, which is going on now, is that it was consensual and that's not disputed. The psychiatrists say he's perfectly sane. The truth is, the man wrote back and said, 'Yes, I want to have sex with you and afterward I want you to kill me and to eat me.' Obviously, all homosexuals are not prone to that kind of barbarism, but once you go down the road where you say 'Anything two people consent to should be tolerated,' what is the end result? There will be more and more of this. Even separate from traditional religion, there comes a point where any clear-thinking individual will say, 'This is not good for the people involved, this is not good for society, and it's not the kind of role-modeling we want for our children.'"

While some Catholics might take offense at such remarks as intolerant, LiMandri speaks in an almost sorrowful tone, revealing a strong sense of human empathy. "We are called by the Holy Father to always speak the truth on these issues -- to do it with compassion, sensitivity and respect. We're talking about fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who are struggling with sin, just as we are.... But it will not be good for society if we embrace [homosexuality] the way we have embraced heterosexual relationships for centuries as the only proper and legitimate form for people to join together in marriage."

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