The Award Goes To...

One more reason to love Susan Sarandon

March 1, 1998 By Scott Hess

Talk about a star turn. Susan Sarandon, who keeps her Oscar for *Dead Man Walking* in her bathroom, decided that her alumni achievement award wasn't even worthy of such status.

She handed it back to Catholic University (CU), 15 years after receiving it, in protest of CU's decision last October to rescind actor Joseph Sicari's Distinguished Alumni Award after learning that he was an ACT UP founding member. In a letter to CU prez Brother Patrick Ellis, Sarandon, who has ACTed UP herself, wrote, "Protest is a demand in this free society to be heard and ... Mr. Sicari should be commended, not punished, for his work with this organization."

When Ellis replied that he could not comment because Sicari had threatened to sue, Sarandon shot off another letter, which read: "Your short, curt, impersonal letter leaves me with no other recourse than to return my award. I find your actions on this matter narrow-minded and completely antithetical to my perceptions of Catholic charity and compassion."

Sicari, who appeared Off-Broadway in *Dames at Sea,* denied reports that during the flap he flaked out on ACT UP and denounced its 1989 "Stop the Church!" disruption of a mass inside St. Patrick's Cathedral to protest Cardinal O'Connor's anti-condom, anti-abortion stances. "Brother Ellis said they defecated on and desecrated the Eucharist, and I said I don't agree with those particular tactics," said Sicari, who was not at the demo. He recently dropped in on an ACT UP meeting to show support and, while no longer an active member, said, "that doesn't mean I'd never do a demo."

ACT UP/New York veteran Ann Northrop, one of the "safe-sex six" defendants in the post-protest trial, said the defecation charge "is outrageous and unbelievable. It didn't happen." Sicari, who has received a slew of supportive letters from CU alumni, is discussing his next move with civil rights lawyers. His goal? A public apology.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/The-Award-Goes-To-7034-9533