

# CONFSSIONAL VICTORY

After many months of wrangling, the confessional seal remains intact in Washington state. State officials have given up their quest to force Catholic priests to divulge what they learn in the confessional. It took an array of organizations and specialists to exact this outcome.

The Catholic League was the first lay Catholic group in the nation to write to Washington legislators about this issue, and the first to draw media attention to it.

Back in February, Bill Donohue asked the state's lawmakers to explain, "What broke?" He pointedly asked, "where is the evidence that child molesters—in any state—report their crimes to priests in the confessional?" He noted that there is not a single instance where this has happened. He closed by saying, "If any lawmaker has evidence to the contrary, you have an obligation to make it public." No one did.

We brought this issue to the attention of the Civil Rights Division in the U.S. Attorney General's office. Harmeet K. Dhillon, the Deputy Assistant Attorney General, took it from there, suing Washington. Meanwhile, we continued to press public officials, and law firms filed suit in behalf of the Catholic clergy.

A District Court judge blocked the discriminatory state law that singled out priests in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, allowing other professionals, such as counselors and therapists, to be exempt from the reporting law.

The pressure was coming at public officials from all sides. They finally yielded in October.