

# League Pressure Secures Hate Crime Conviction

In an historic move, the Catholic League succeeded in pressing for a hate crime prosecution and conviction of a person charged with violating the rights of Catholics. Never before in the history of New England had someone been found guilty of violating the rights of Catholics under a hate crime statute.

The conviction stems from an incident on June 10 at St. Mary's Church in Lawrence, Massachusetts. It was on that day that David Cedeno and another man burst into the church in the middle of Mass with hoods over their heads and stole two chalices and a communion paten, all of which contained the Blessed Sacrament. Parishioners chased the men down the street and managed to get the attention of the police, who promptly made the arrest. Cedeno was charged with larceny and disturbing an assembly of worship, but no civil rights charges were lodged against him.

When the Massachusetts chapter of the Catholic League learned of the charges, it issued a public statement calling for prosecution under the civil rights law. Essex County District Attorney Kevin Burke responded to the League's plea by seeking a grand jury indictment against Cedeno for constitutional rights violations. Burke was successful but Cedeno's attorneys petitioned to have the constitutional charges dismissed. However, Essex County Superior Court Judge Joseph Grasso denied the defense motion.

Following his guilty plea, Cedeno, despite having no previous criminal record, was sentenced to 3 to 5 years incarceration in state prison. Operations Director Joe Doyle congratulated District Attorney Burke and called the sentence "an appropriate penalty, and a strong signal to those who would contemplate attacking a house of worship." It was significant

that a letter from Massachusetts Chapter President Dan Flatly was entered into a victim impact statement. The letter, which described Cedeno's offense as an "outrageous and unprecedented crime," was reviewed by the court prior to sentencing.

The Catholic League has no position on the merits of hate crime legislation. But if it is legal to use this law against those who have trashed the rights of virtually every other segment of society, then surely the Catholic League will not sit back and watch the rights of its people be abused without availing itself of the same remedy.