

OFFICIALS IN ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS TARGET CHURCH

Over Labor Day weekend, some members of the Winnebago County Board designed a plan to tear down a Catholic Church, St. Mary's Oratory, and replace it with a new county jail. The church, which is the second oldest in Rockford, is the only Catholic church that services downtown residents. A vote by the Public Safety Committee is scheduled for today; tomorrow the full board will vote.

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue today:

"We are contacting every member of the Winnebago County Board urging them to scratch this hastily drawn plan today. St. Mary's is not just another church: built in 1885, it was fully restored as St. Mary's Shrine in 1997 by Bishop Thomas Doran and the Institute of Christ the King. Parishioners responded by donating a quarter-million dollars to have it restored. Furthermore, attendance has exploded as hundreds of young people and their families make their way to the church on weekends; during the week the church is frequented by local government workers. To top it off, St. Mary's is the only church in the nation to offer the Latin Mass exclusively twice daily.

"Building a new county jail is important, but surely it can be done without demolishing a church of this significance. St. Mary's sports a vibrant community and is led by one of America's premier bishops. In short, it merits a special place in the Rockford community.

"To bulldoze St. Mary's so that local thugs can have a new home is more than insensitive—it's insane. Because of the uniqueness of this church, Catholics from all over America

will keep a close eye on how county officials react.”