

OREGON D.A. APOLOGIZES FOR BUGGING PRIEST IN CONFESSIONAL

Oregon's Lane County District Attorney Doug Harclerod admitted on May 22 that he made a mistake in arranging for the bugging of a priest, Father Tim Mockaitis, in a confessional in the Lane County Jail on April 22. Father Mockaitis administered the Sacrament of Reconciliation to Conan Wayne Hale and did not know that his conversation was being taped by the authorities.

In a statement made to the press, D.A. Harclerod said that he apologized to Father Mockaitis earlier in the day. But he also said that what he did was legally and ethically correct. D.A. Harclerod has asked that the tape of the confessional be placed under court seal and that it not be destroyed until it is no longer needed as evidence.

When the Catholic League learned of the bugging, it called for an investigation by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and for a Congressional inquiry as well. Catholic League President William Donohue issued the following comments regarding D.A. Harclerod's statement

"The Catholic League is delighted with D.A. Harclerod's epiphany and we accept his apology. But we are also struck by his need for an education in law and morality. For him to maintain that there was no legal or ethical violation involved in his decision to bug a priest in a confessional is preposterous: what D.A. Harclerod did was legally unconstitutional and morally unconscionable.

"The next step to be taken by the Catholic League is to mobilize Congressional support for a federal law that permanently ensures the confidentiality of the priest-penitent

relationship. When government agents attempt to crash the wall between church and state by penetrating the sanctity of the confessional, it is clear that what was once considered sacrosanct is now seen as mundane. The Catholic League will work to correct this understanding and will use the law as its pedagogical device.”

The Catholic League is the nation’s largest Catholic civil rights organization. It defends individual Catholics and the institutional Church from defamation and discrimination.