

# ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS POLITICIANS SCRATCH PLANS TO NIX 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 Catholic League jumped into the fray, as did Rockford Bishop Thomas Doran, and in no time the plan was scratched.

Here's what happened. On September 2, the day after Labor Day, Scott P. Richert contacted William Donohue alerting him to the plan. Richert is the executive editor of *Chronicles*, the flagship magazine of The Rockford Institute (Donohue has written for the publication under the auspices of its director, Thomas Fleming). On September 3, Donohue issued a news release on the subject and e-mailed every member of the Winnebago County Board expressing his concerns.

St. Mary's Oratory is not just another Catholic church. Built in 1885, it is the second-oldest church in Rockford, Illinois and the only church in the nation to offer the Latin Mass exclusively twice daily. Moreover, it was fully restored as St. Mary's Shrine in 1997 by Bishop Doran and the Institute of Christ the King. Furthermore, attendance has exploded as hundreds of young people and their families make their way to the church on weekends.

On September 3, Donohue was interviewed by Chris Bowman on a local radio station, WNTA. Joining him on the broadcast was Bishop Doran. Both made the case that the officials were acting hastily and unfairly. Before they even got off the air, some of the officials whom Donohue had contacted were already contacting him saying they would not support razing St. Mary's.

On September 4, Donohue issued another news release. This time he said he was delighted with the response from county officials; they had met the night before and decided not to go ahead with the plan.

Donohue concluded with the following remarks: "This is a textbook example of democracy in action. The Catholic League is contacted by Scott P. Richert of the Rockford Institute; I issue a news release and e-mail every member of the county board; Chris Bowman of WNTA interviews me; Rockford Bishop Thomas Doran joins the interview; and county officials scratch the plan."

This also shows what can happen when a bishop decides to engage the media. Bishop Doran has shown himself once again why he is one of our finest bishops in the nation.