

# WORLD & NATION

## Archdiocese decries taped confession

By John Roscoe  
Catholic News Service

PORTLAND, Ore. — Lawyers for the Archdiocese of Portland were in negotiations with the Lane County Sheriff's Department for a settlement they hoped would result in the destruction of a tape recording of a sacramental confession.

Jailers in Lane County secretly tape-recorded an April session in which Conan Hale, a 20-year-old murder suspect, received the sacrament of reconciliation from Father Timothy Mockaitis, pastor of St. Paul Parish in Eugene. Both were unaware they were being recorded.

Oregon law exempts clergy from being questioned about private conversations, but District Attorney Doug Harclerod said laws allowing recording of conversations inside jails do not exempt sacramental confessions. Only conversations between a prisoner and his attorney are specifically exempted in the law.

Auxiliary Bishop D. Kenneth Steiner, administrator of the archdiocese, asked Harclerod to destroy the tape and any information prosecutors and investigators obtained from it.

"In response to the civil authorities' shocking disregard of our religious practice, I have asked (Harclerod) to destroy the tape and to guarantee the future integrity of the sacrament for the incarcerated," Bishop Steiner said.

The district attorney had not formally responded to the request by May 20, but he has said repeatedly that investigators acted legally.

In the meantime, special areas at the jail have been designated for priests to hear confessions for inmates in the future. Officials also have posted signs informing visitors to the jail that conversations they have with prisoners over phone handsets might be recorded.

"This is not ultimately about Roman Catholicism," Father Michael Maslowsky, director of pastoral services for the Port-



land Archdiocese, told the Portland daily, the Oregonian. "It's about freedom of religion."

Bishop Steiner sent letters to all parishes in the archdiocese after the incident was made public May 3, explaining the circumstances and assuring Catholics that the confidentiality of the sacrament is "complete and absolute."

Hale has been implicated in the murders of three teen-agers whose bodies were found in December near Springfield, Ore. While Hale was in jail on related burglary and theft charges, investigators learned of his request to speak to a priest and arranged to record their session.

The incident has drawn expressions of outrage from across the country and attracted the attention of the Vatican, which has not issued a formal comment. Oregon's major newspapers editorialized against the jailers and investigators, saying the recording violated the constitutional freedom of religion.

Religious and civil liberties organiza-

tions have volunteered to help keep the tape recording out of the criminal case. The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights has called for an investigation of Harclerod's office by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and by Congress.

"At stake is the sanctity of the confessional, a central exercise of religious freedom for Roman Catholics," league president William Donohue said in a statement. "For over 200 years this sacrament has been afforded a confidential status by the state and has been enshrined in law by several U.S. Supreme Court decisions. The sacrament ... cannot be compromised for any reason."

Democratic state Sen. Bill Dwyer said he planned to introduce a bill to explicitly prevent such recordings, and a Lane County commissioner called for a formal investigation.

At Mass at St. Paul's the Sunday after the incident came to light, parishioners jammed the church and gave Father Mockaitis a standing ovation.

## Canons guard secrecy of rite

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Interpretations of civil law regarding the recording of a jailhouse confession may be a bit murky, but there's little room for confusion in canon law, the Catholic Church's legal code.

The canon-law codes of the Latin-rite and Eastern-rite Catholic Church explicitly forbid priests from using knowledge acquired during the sacrament of confession in any way.

And not only are confessors who violate the seal of confession subject to excommunication or other penalties, so is anybody else who attempts to gain information from confession.

The question of just how sacred and private is the sacrament of reconciliation arose when jailers in Eugene, Ore., secretly tape-recorded a confession between a prisoner and a Catholic priest.

The Lane County district attorney has contended there is no exclusion for sacramental confession in Oregon laws that permit the recording of inmate conversations. Only conversations between lawyer and client are specifically exempted.

As far as canon law is concerned, however, the sacramental seal is inviolable.

"It is absolutely wrong for a confessor in any way to betray the penitent, for any reason whatsoever, whether by word or in any other fashion," reads Canon 983 of the Latin-rite code. The penalty for a direct violation of the sacramental seal is excommunication. The same applies to any interpreter whose services may be needed for the sacrament.

"The confessor is wholly forbidden to use knowledge acquired in confession to the detriment of the penitent, even when all danger of disclosure is excluded," Canon 984 reads.

## CALENDAR

### All Diocesan

#### Meeting

■ **SUN, MAY 26** — General meeting: sponsored by Catholic Women's Club of Rochester; Christ the King Parish hall, 445 Kings Highway South, Rochester; 2 p.m.; Phyllis Contestable as "Reverend Mother" in original skit.

#### Religious Activities

■ **MAY 24-26** — Weekend retreat: "Praying in Carmel"; Mt. Carmel Spiritual Centre, Niagara Falls, N.Y.; \$100; for more information, call 905/356-4113.

### Chemung Schuyler

#### Entertainment

■ **THUR, MAY 23** — Concert: rescheduled from March 24; performed by Frank Patterson, Irish tenor; Notre Dame High School auditorium, 1400 Maple Ave., Elmira; 8 p.m.; tickets for the original date will be honored, seats are still available; call Notre Dame High School,

607/734-2267.

#### Health

■ **SAT, JUNE 1** — Immunization clinic: for children between two months and 5 years of age in need of shots; free clinic at Arnot Mall Community Room, Elmira; 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; co-sponsored by St. Joseph's Hospital Foundation and Chemung County Health Department; for more information, call 607/737-7004.

#### Religious Activities

■ **MON, MAY 27** — Annual Field Mass: at Ss. Peter & Paul Cemetery, west end of Franklin St., Elmira; noon; Fr. Severine, celebrant; in event of rain the Mass will be at St. Mary's Church, Franklin St., Elmira; sponsored by Elmira Council 229 Knights of Columbus; bring your own chair.

### Monroe County

#### Education

■ **WED, MAY 29** — Workshop: "Inner Awareness Practices for Self-Help and Healing,"

first of four-course workshop; taught by Marjorie Baker Price, BSN, RN, and Robin Ann Curtis, MSN, RN; St. John Fisher College, 3690 East Ave., Rochester; 3:30-6:30 p.m.; each course costs \$35; remaining courses June 12, 26, and July 10; for information, call 716/385-8320.

■ **FRI, MAY 31** — Seminar: "Apollo 13 Leadership: Down-to-Earth Lessons for You and Your Organization"; presented by Capt. James A. Lovell and corporate leader Dr. James A. Belasco; sponsored by St. John Fisher College's Professional Development Office; Rochester Riverside Convention Center, Main St., Rochester; 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m.; \$345 per person, includes breakfast, lunch, workbook; for more information, call 716/385-8320.

#### Fundraisers

■ **SAT, JUNE 1** — Pig roast: to benefit the House of Mercy; Webster Park's White House, Webster; noon till 3; \$10 adult, children under 12 \$2; for tickets and information, call 716/544-1537, 342-1748 or 544-3521.

#### Religious Activities

■ **CONTINUES TO JUNE 24** — Novena: to Our Lady of Perpetual Help; 1089 Joseph

Ave., Rochester; 7 p.m.

■ **MAY 31-JUNE 8** — Nine-day novena: Della Madonna Dei Miracoli Rosary Society; begins May 31 at 7:30 p.m. and concludes June 8 at 5:30 p.m.; St. Jude the Apostle Church, 4100 Lyell Road, Rochester; novena will conclude with a dinner-dance at St. Jude's; tickets \$25 per person.

■ **SAT, JUNE 1** — Catechist in-service: St. Christopher's Church, 3350 N. Union St., North Chili; 9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; presented by the Southwest Catechetical Leaders; \$7.

■ **SAT, JUNE 1** — Centennial Anniversary: sponsored by the Rochester Knights of Columbus Council 178; St. Monica's Church, 831 Genesee St., Rochester; begins with 4 p.m. Mass concelebrated by Bishop Matthew Clark, and Fathers Robert Werth and Paul Wohlrab; followed by a reception and dinner at 7 p.m. at the Airport-Holiday Inn on Brooks Ave.; \$30; for reservations, call 716/288-4654.

#### Social Activities

■ **MAY 23-25** — Festival: St. John's Church, 2400 W. Ridge Road, Rochester; 6-11 p.m. each evening and on Saturday, "Family Fun" from 1-4 p.m. includes kids and adult rides.

■ **SUN, MAY 26** — Day Trip: to Niagara on the Lake; sponsored by St. Thomas More Singles Club; meet at Ridgeman Plaza, under the sign; 10:30 a.m.; call Anne, 716/482-5656.

### Steuben County

#### Religious Activities

■ **MON, MAY 27** — Memorial Day Mass: in the new cemetery, St. Joseph's, Wayland; 9 a.m.; bring your own chairs.

■ **TUE, MAY 28** — Memorial Mass: for Father Joseph Hogan; former pastor of St. Vincent dePaul in Corning; 7:30 p.m. at St. Vincent's Church, 222 Dodge Ave., Corning; all parishioners, friends, and ministerial colleagues are invited.

### Tompkin Tioga

#### Religious Activities

■ **SAT, MAY 25** — Celebration of Pentecost: "A Reunion with the Holy Spirit"; St. Patrick's Church, 300 Main St., Owego; 7:30 p.m.