

## **SUGGESTED MESSAGING IN RELATION TO SB 360**

The State Legislature is considering a bill to regulate the Sacrament of Penance and force priests to break the Seal of Confession. It would make the same demands on similar religious practices by other faiths and denominations in California.

It is a bad bill.

The bill is referred to as SB 360 by state Sen. Jerry Hill (D-San Mateo). The motivation for the bill is noble, to uncover and stop the abuse of children, but under certain circumstances, SB 360 would make it a crime if a priest heard the confession of a child abuse victim or a child abuser and failed to break the Seal of Confession to report what they heard in the Confessional to law enforcement.

Confession and Penance are central to the practice of our Catholic faith. Neither the Legislature nor the author of the bill understand the meaning of Confession to Catholics. It is an act where a person reveals his conscience to God, hoping to receive God's Mercy. It helps us prepare to receive the Eucharist and to participate fully in our Faith. It reminds us and tangibly shows us the power of God's Love.

Recently, SB 360 was amended to reduce its scope. Instead of having to report the contents of all Confessions heard by a priest, the bill would now only require reporting on the contents of some of the Confessions he heard. Chaplains in prisons would be allowed to respect the Confessional Seal if they heard the Confession of an inmate, but not of a prison guard or other prison worker. Chaplains at hospitals could anoint the sick and hear their Confessions, but they could not hear Confessions from doctors, nurses and other hospital staff without being required to report what they heard.

Even more alarming, priests could not hear Confessions from other priests without reporting the contents to law enforcement. Nor could they hear Confessions from their work colleagues at parishes, schools, colleges, Catholic Charities or anyplace else they worked without having to report the contents to law enforcement.

For the priest, *it is a mortal sin and automatic Excommunication* for him to reveal the contents of a person's confession. In the past, priests have chosen torture and death rather than break their solemn vow to protect the Seal of Confession. That's how important it is.

The certainty of confidentiality and the knowledge that Confession is a sacred conversation with God encourages Catholics to seek out and receive God's Mercy.

Reducing, but not eliminating, the number of times a priest has to choose incarceration or excommunication does not make SB 360 a better bill.

Please let your state legislators hear from you. Please tell them SB 360 is a bad bill and should not be approved and sent to Gov. Newsom.