



From Washington bishops to the lay faithful

Subject: Update on State Law

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

As you may know, Governor Ferguson signed into law a provision that seeks to require priests to violate the Seal of the Confessional in some circumstances. Priests are unable to violate the Seal under any circumstances. As the Vatican wrote on the topic in 2019,

The inviolable secrecy of Confession comes directly from the revealed divine right and is rooted in the very nature of the Sacrament, to the point of not admitting any exception in the ecclesial sphere, nor, least of all, in the civil one.¹

Indeed, the Church has said that “political action or legislative initiative[s] aimed at ‘breaching’ the inviolability of the seal” are “an unacceptable offense against *libertas Ecclesiae*, which does not receive its legitimacy from individual States, but from God.”²

Given this troubling development in state law, we are addressing this matter through litigation. While the details of this case are sensitive and will be handled with care, we want to assure you that this action is being taken to protect the mission and integrity of the Church.

The United States and Washington State Constitutions provide robust protection for our faith and we are confident in our legal position. Our attorneys have filed the case, and we will keep you informed as appropriate, while respecting the confidentiality required in such matters.

Thank you for your prayers and faithfulness. May God bless you, and may Our Lady keep you in her care.

In the Heart of Christ,

Most Rev. Paul D. Etienne
Archbishop of Seattle

Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima

Most Rev. Thomas A. Daly
Bishop of Spokane

Most Rev. Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S.
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle

Most Rev. Frank Schuster
Auxiliary Bishop of Seattle

¹Note of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the Importance of the Internal Forum and the Inviolability of the Sacramental Seal (June 29, 2019).

²Id.