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Vatican: iPhone apps won't forgive sins

by Francis X. Rocca by Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Just in case Catholics are wondering if a new iPhone app might be able to forgive their sins, the Vatican has issued a clarification: No.

"One may not speak in any sense of confessing via iPhone," Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, director of the Holy See Press Office, said in a statement on Wednesday.

According to its U.S. producers, "Confession: A Roman Catholic App" is designed to help users prepare for confession through a "personalized examination of conscience for each user, password protected profiles, and a step-by-step guide to the sacrament."

The Indiana-based company, Little iApps LLC, says its app is the first to receive an imprimatur, or official permission for publication, from a Catholic bishop—in this case, Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend.

Lombardi said the "Sacrament of Penance necessarily requires the relationship of personal dialogue between the penitent and the confessor and absolution by the confessor present."

"This cannot be substituted for by any information technology application," he said.

The Vatican has cautiously embraced information technology and new media in recent years, but Pope Benedict XVI last month warned digital communication poses special dangers to Christian values and face-to-face relationships.

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