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Diocese: Priest wrong in Obama condemnation

by Daniel Burke by Religion News Service

A South Carolina Catholic priest was wrong to warn parishioners who voted for President-elect Barack Obama to confess their sin before receiving Communion, according to the head of the priest's diocese.

Monsignor Martin T. Laughlin, administrator of the Diocese of Charleston, said in a statement late Friday (Nov. 14) that "if a person has formed his or her conscience well, he or she should not be denied Communion, nor be told to go to confession before receiving Communion."

Last week, the Rev. Jay Scott Newman of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Greenville, said that by receiving Communion, Obama supporters "drink and eat their own condemnation," because the president-elect supports abortion rights. Newman later said he would not deny the sacrament to anyone "based on political opinions or choices."

Newman's statements "do not adequately reflect the Catholic Church's teachings. Any comments or statements to the contrary are repudiated," Laughlin said. He added that Newman pulled the church's moral teachings "into the partisan political arena" and "diverted the focus from the church's clear position against abortion."

Laughlin cites the Catholic Church's catechism, which states that "man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions."

"Christ gives us the freedom to explore our own consciences and to make our decisions while adhering to the law of God and the teachings of the faith," Laughlin said. "We should all come together to support the president-elect and all elected officials with a view to influencing policy in favor of the protection of the unborn child."

Laughlin was appointed the interim administrator of the statewide Charleston diocese when Bishop

Robert J. Baker was transferred to Birmingham, Ala., last year.

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