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Archdiocese of St. Louis Files Federal Lawsuit in Defense of Religious Liberty

The Archdiocese of St. Louis steadfastly supports the right of all Catholics and the priests who serve them to practice their Catholic faith. That is why the Archdiocese, along with Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski and Fr. Chris Schroeder, have filed a lawsuit in federal court (in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri, SE Division).

The Ste. Genevieve Detention Center currently prohibits Catholic priests from offering, and Catholic detainees from receiving, the sacraments of confession and communion. Priests are also not permitted to say Mass. Offering and receiving these sacraments is a central tenet of our faith. Catholics receive the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the deprivation of these sacraments imposes real and immediate harm on Catholic detainees and priests. Moreover, the jail limits the hours that clergy may visit the imprisoned (4 hours a week), meaning that the spiritual care priests can provide is severely restricted and, for some detainees, nonexistent. As a result of this policy, Catholic priests cannot fulfill the mission to which Matthew 25:36 calls them, namely, to welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. This ministry is central to our Catholic calling and necessary to care for the souls of detained Catholics.

The Archdiocese asked the jail to accommodate clergy to provide the sacraments to detainees, but the jail has refused. That refusal is troubling, given that other individuals—including lawyers and consular officials—are permitted to visit detained individuals under much more permissive circumstances. The Catholic Church does not seek special treatment, but only requests the same access as these other groups which, if provided, would allow clergy to offer the Catholic sacraments detainees desperately want.

Our Catholic priests regularly visit and provide the sacraments to criminal detainees in other jails, but are unable to do so at the Ste. Genevieve Detention Center. The lawsuit asks the federal court to halt these policies and restore the religious liberty rights of priests and the detained. It names jail officials responsible for these policies, as well as federal officials who are responsible for the detainees (and who house them in the Ste. Genevieve jail pursuant to a federal-state contract to do so).

We have faith that the judicial system will vindicate the God-given right to religious freedom that ensures Catholics—and all the faithful—may practice their faith, even while imprisoned. ###

[The Archdiocese of St. Louis](#) was established in 1826 and is comprised today of more than 444,000 Catholics in 11 Missouri counties.

Led by the Most Reverend Archbishop Mitchell T. Rozanski in communion with His Holiness Pope Leo XIV, we are called by our Lord, Jesus Christ, to be His Church and live His Gospel. Learn more about the Archdiocese of St. Louis at www.archstl.org, and on Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn.