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Priest says he had permission to allow Maher to film in church

Jeff Diamant Religion News Service | Oct. 18, 2008

PARK RIDGE, N.J.
The pastor of a Catholic church, facing criticism from his archbishop for letting comedian Bill Maher film part of his movie "Religulous" there, said he actually had been given advance permission by the archdiocese to do so.

The contention by the Rev. Charles Grandstrand came after reports that Archbishop John J. Myers of Newark was upset that the priest let Maher shoot the scene on church property at Our Lady of Mercy Catholic Church.

The controversial movie derides organized religion of all kinds. Myers' spokesman, James Goodness, had said he had told Grandstrand not to let Maher film there because the archdiocese forbids commercial filming on its property.

Grandstrand had not responded to requests for an interview.

But on Thursday (Oct. 16), in a letter to the editor of The Star-Ledger, Grandstrand wrote that Goodness had told the church's administrative assistant that it would be all right to let Maher talk to his mother in the church, which the Maher family attended decades ago. He said Goodness told the church to reject the production company's request to film a Mass.

"Mr. Maher and his family were parishioners of Our Lady of Mercy," Grandstrand wrote. "Mr. Maher was baptized and received his first Communion at Our Lady of Mercy. Based on the information I had, I chose to allow a former parishioner access to his childhood church."

Goodness, reached Thursday for comment, said he remembered the events unfolding differently. He said he had told Grandstrand not to let the company film anything inside the church.

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