

The Seal of Confession

The standard of secrecy protecting a confession outweighs any form of professional confidentiality or secrecy. This secrecy is called "the sacramental seal," "the seal of the confessional," or "the seal of confession."

The sacramental seal is inviolable. Quoting Canon 983.1 of the Code of Canon Law, the Catechism states, "...It is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason" (No. 2490). A priest cannot reveal the contents of a confession either directly, by repeating the substance of what has been said, or indirectly, by some sign, suggestion, or action. A Decree from the Holy Office (Nov. 18, 1682) mandated that confessors are forbidden, even where there would be no revelation direct or indirect, to make any use of the knowledge obtained in the confession that would reveal the penitent's identity.