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## Priest threatens reporter during interview

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By Robin Miller  
MediaNews staff  
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A Fairfield priest verbally and physically attacked a reporter during an interview Wednesday morning at the Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, according to a report filed with police.

Staff writer Ryan Chalk of the Vacaville Reporter, a MediaNews paper, went to the church to talk to the Rev. Sebastian Meyer about a story on an alleged conflict with a parishioner that had happened during Sunday Mass.

After identifying himself as a reporter, Chalk explained that he was working on a story about a parishioner who claimed the priest expelled her from Mass because her vehicle sported painted signs in support of president-elect Barack Obama.

"He became very agitated," Chalk said. "He told me, 'No, we're not writing that. I did not touch her. I did not talk to her.'"

Chalk said Meyer then threatened to file a lawsuit if any story were written and told him it was "illegal because it's none of your business."

"At that point, I took my notepad out and asked what was illegal," Chalk said.

Meyer became more agitated and lunged at him, Chalk said, clawing at his arm and reaching for his notepad.

Stunned, the reporter turned to run out the door as Meyer continued to grab at him.

"He yelled, 'Where are you going?'" said Chalk, who admitted he cursed and told the priest and another man in the parish office to stay back and threatened to call police on them if they didn't.

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"It was absolutely shocking," Chalk said. "It's the

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last thing I would expect from a priest. I mean, I'm sure this was not the first time he's dealt with inquiries from the media, especially with his years in that position. He should know ways to step around it or simply say 'I don't wish to comment.' That would have been fine."

Chalk reported the incident to police and the Sacramento Diocese, which oversees all Catholic churches in the region.

Kevin Eckery, who handles media relations for the diocese, said that because a report of the incident had been made to police, he couldn't comment on specifics.






Still, he acknowledged the right of the reporter to ask questions.

"Certainly, it is the job of reporters to ask questions. People don't always like to answer them, but it's your job to ask them," he said.

"We felt it was important to report on this development to our readers," explained Editor Diane Barney. "Any time freedom of the press is challenged, we take it seriously."

Attorney Roger Myers, who represents The Reporter and other MediaNews Group properties, said the paper was well within its rights to approach the priest and ask about a newsworthy topic and to give him an opportunity to explain his side of the story.

"Fortunately, it's not a frequent occurrence where someone being interviewed takes so much exception that a confrontation occurs," Myers said. "It's a shame this priest doesn't understand the role of a free press."

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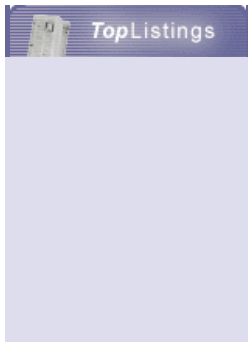
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