

Charisma News Brief: California Priest Turns Taqueria into a Sinister Confessional

Instead of being the basis of a good “A priest walks into a taqueria...” joke, the situation turned sinister as employees who used the priest for confessional felt he was there to intimidate them, nothing more.

Amid allegations and an investigation into wage theft, a Northern California taqueria had a priest come into the restaurant so that employees could “confess” the sins they had committed at the workplace.

The investigation was already underway at Taqueria Garibaldi by the Wage and Hour Department in 2021, when owner Eduardo Hernandez thought it may be a good idea to offer his employees the opportunity for a workplace confession.

“I found the conversation to be strange and unlike normal confessions,” said Maria Parra, an employee of the restaurant.

But this was not a traditional confession session, oh no, that was not the point of the priest coming in.

Instead, Parra claims in a sworn affidavit for the Department of Labor in regards to the ongoing lawsuit against Hernandez and the restaurant, the priest would ask specific questions with the intent to “get the sins out of me.”

“He asked if I ever got pulled over for speeding, if I drank alcohol, or if I had stolen anything. The priest mostly had work-related questions, which I thought was strange. The priest asked if I had stolen anything at work, if I was late

to my employment, if I did anything to harm my employer, and if I had any intention toward my employment,” Parra said.

The investigation underway was due to accusations that employees were having their tips withheld and were not being paid the mandatory overtime wages they were earning.

This led to a federal judge for the Eastern District of California to order a payment of \$140,000 to the employees from the restaurant’s owner and operators.

“Under oath, an employee of Taqueria Garibaldi explained how the restaurant offered a supposed priest to hear their workplace ‘sins’ while other employees reported that a manager falsely claimed that immigration issues would be raised by the department’s investigation,” said Marc Pilotin, the regional solicitor of labor. “This employer’s despicable attempts to retaliate against employees were intended to silence workers, obstruct an investigation and prevent the recovery of unpaid wages.

“They did feel that Eduardo brought the priest to intimidate them,” says Raquel Alfaro, investigator for the case. {eo}

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