

# Faith Digest: Monks can make caskets

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**Casket ruling buries monks' opposition.** The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled the Benedictine monks of [St. Joseph Abbey](#) near Covington, La., have a right to sell handmade wooden caskets in their home state. The ruling affirmed a lower court's judgment, which said the Louisiana State Board of Embalmers and Funeral Directors cannot restrict the market only to licensed funeral directors. The monks' victory gives Louisiana consumers access to basic cypress caskets that sell for \$1,500 and \$2,000—far below prices charged at the state's funeral homes, according to the court opinion. The Catholic monks of St. Joseph long have been buried in plain wooden caskets built by hand at the abbey. When they needed an alternate source of income after Hurricane Katrina decimated timber holdings that previously provided essential income for the abbey, they started Saint Joseph Woodworks. They were able to sell in other states, but the Louisiana board moved in 2007 to block them from doing business in their own state. With this ruling, the 5th Circuit parts ways with the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, which in 2004 upheld a similar law restricting casket sales in Oklahoma. The issue ultimately could be decided in the U.S. Supreme Court if the embalmers and funeral directors board decides to appeal.

**Catholics too weak against Islam, Muslim convert insists.**



Magdi Cristiano AllamA high-profile Italian Muslim who

converted to Catholicism and was baptized by Pope Benedict XVI announced he will leave the church to protest its soft stance against Islam. Egyptian-born Magdi Cristiano Allam, 61, a prominent journalist and outspoken critic of Islam, publicly entered the Catholic Church on March 22, 2008, during an Easter Vigil service, receiving baptism directly from Benedict. Allam, who has called Islam an “intrinsically violent ideology,” said his main reason for leaving the church was its perceived “religious relativism, in particular the legitimization of Islam as a true religion.”