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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 23, 2007

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TWO MEN PLEAD GUILTY IN LASSEN COUNTY CROSS BURNING

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced that KEVIN WILLIAM RIDENOUR, 21, and NICHOLAS EDWARD CRAIG, 18, both of Westwood, California, each pleaded guilty before United States District Judge Frank C. Damrell in Sacramento this morning to interference with housing rights, a felony. The crime relates to the burning of a cross outside the rectory of a Catholic church in Westport, California on March 23, 2007. The Priest who resides in the rectory is from Rwanda, central Africa, and was assigned to Westport by the Catholic Archdiocese of Sacramento in October, 2006.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Lassen County Sheriff's Office.

According to Assistant United States Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner and Sean C. Flynn, who are prosecuting the case, defendants RIDENOUR and CRAIG in their pleas of guilty admitted that in the early morning hours of March 23, 2007, they constructed a wooden cross approximately 5'6" high and 3'5" wide, transported it to the street outside the driveway of the church rectory, erected it there, doused it with gasoline, and set it on fire. They admitted that they did so in order to threaten and intimidate the Priest because of his race, and the fact that he was occupying the rectory building. They also admitted that, while building the cross, they discussed the fact that the "KKK" had used burning crosses to intimidate black persons.

"It shocks the conscience that such hateful acts are carried out in this day and age," said United States Attorney Scott.

Sentencing for both defendants was scheduled for July 2, 2007. The maximum statutory penalty for the offense is up to ten years in prison, although the actual sentence will be determined by the Judge after considering the federal sentencing guidelines and the defendants' criminal histories. According to the plea agreement, the Government will recommend two years in prison for defendant RIDENOUR, and 21 months in prison for defendant CRAIG. Both defendants remain in custody pending sentencing.

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