

Churchmen Ask McKeithen Act on O'Hara Charges

Request Issue Go to High Court

By HERMAN DREZINSKI

A unit of the Greater New Orleans Federation of Churches has called upon Gov. John J. McKeithen to seek a hearing before the Louisiana Supreme Court to determine whether Criminal Court Judge Malcolm V. O'Hara should be removed from office.

The request was made in a letter sent four days ago to McKeithen by the Civic Affairs Department of the federation.

The letter describes the conduct of Judge O'Hara in connection with his admitted relationship with a convicted felon as "highly questionable."

IT URGES the governor to instruct Attorney General Jack P. F. Gremillion to initiate a Supreme Court hearing "so that Judge O'Hara may be either removed from office or cleared of these grave charges."

Judge O'Hara, in federal court testimony last month in Chicago, admitted he had been the expense-paid traveling companion of New Orleans builder Zachary A. "Red" Strate, who was convicted along with Teamster Union president James R. Hoffa in 1964 on charges of conspiracy and fraud.

The judge further testified he had acted as a messenger in an attempt to get Baton Rouge Teamster official Ed-

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ward Grady Partin, whose testimony was instrumental in convicting Hoffa in his earlier jury-tampering trial at Chattanooga, to sign an affidavit that Hoffa was convicted on the basis of wiretap information.

The federation unit's letter is the third request to the state administration to take action in the O'Hara matter.

Earlier this month the New Orleans Bar Association asked Gremillion to investigate the judge. And the Metropolitan New Orleans Crime Commission urged the governor to institute proceedings aimed at removing O'Hara from office.

The crime commission has also written O'Hara urging him to "immediately resign from any further performance of judicial functions . . ."

JUDGE O'HARA answered the request with a verbal attack on commission managing director Aaron M. Kohn, whom he called a "professional muckraker, charlatan and a genius at spewing fourth a great volume of half truths and innuendos."

Gov. McKeithen answered the crime commission's request by saying that the law requires the attorney general to initiate an investigation of a judge if the governor or 25 citizens request it. He said he felt the crime commission has not exhausted its local remedies.

The Rev. George H. Wilson, executive secretary of the church federation, revealed the latest letter to McKeithen at today's weekly meeting of the Key Men, an affiliate of the federation.

AUTHORED by Ralph E. Beets, chairman, the letter was sent to member churches of the federation and recommends federation board action at the next board meeting Tuesday.

"We are also communicating our concern to our Roman Catholic and Jewish brethren in the hope that they will join us in memorializing the governor," said Beets.

Following is the text of the letter sent to Gov. McKeithen:

"We wish to commend you and express our warmest appreciation for your leadership in the fight against organized crime in Louisiana. Specifically, we refer to the investigation you authorized into possible connections between organized crime and high state officials. We firmly support this undertaking.

"ANOTHER MATTER of deep concern to us is the highly questionable conduct of Criminal District Court Judge Malcolm V. O'Hara. We believe public trust has been betrayed when a man in this position allows and encourages friendly relationships with convicted criminals. In the light of his own sworn testimony it is apparent that Judge O'Hara has done just this.

"We urge you to use the power of your office to correct this deplorable situation. We respectfully request that you formally instruct Attorney General Jack Gremillion to initiate a hearing before the State Supreme Court so that Judge O'Hara may be either removed from office or cleared of these grave charges."