



CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

Città del Vaticano, May 17, 1997

Prot. N. 368/97

Your Eminence:

In your letter, dated January 21, 1997, you expressed the concern of members of the conference regarding perceived delays in the granting of dispensations from the obligations of the Priesthood, including celibacy.

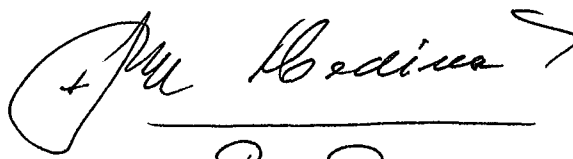
In response this Congregation has conducted a review of all of the cases which have arrived here over the last several years from Australia. It was discovered that for those cases prepared in accord with the October 14, 1980, Norms of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and where the decision was affirmative, that the dispensation was granted on average within four months. The biggest reason for delays has been when this Dicastery has not found the case well instructed and has needed to request further documentation in order to bring the case to the consideration of the Ordinary Commission of the Congregation.

Quite possibly what was being noted at the November meeting of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference concerns those situations in which the priest petitioner has not yet reached forty years of age. In these cases this Dicastery acts in accord with the disposition of higher authority to defer consideration until the petitioner has reached forty years of age. With the numbers of defections of these particularly young priests from the active ministry ever increasing, this precautionary measure has been insisted upon to sustain an esteem for priestly celibacy, to correct the erroneous impression that dispensations may be easily obtained, and to preclude creating scandal among the clergy or the faithful.

At the same time, this Dicastery has received authorization to give consideration in Special Commission to cases where the petitioner is under forty years of age when it can be shown that they would of a type which goes beyond the ordinary reasons for defection, and above all when grave scandal is present, such as when the defects had already emerged before ordination, but were not taken into serious consideration by those entrusted with formation.

With every prayerful good wish and fraternal regard, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Pro-Pref.

His Eminence
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