



NEWS

FILE
COPY

DATE: April 3, 1981

FROM: William Ryan

O - 202/659-6700

H - 202/686-1824

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BISHOPS TOLD PROCESSING MAY BEGIN ON CASES OF EPISCOPALIAN PRIESTS

WASHINGTON--The Catholic Bishops of the United States have been told they may begin processing the petitions of actual or former priests of the Episcopal Church who are married and who wish to serve as priests in the Catholic Church.

This step, reported by Bishop Bernard F. Law of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, MO., marks the first formal action that has been taken since it was announced last August that the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had agreed in principle to a request presented by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on behalf of some clergy and laity of the Episcopal Church seeking full communion with the Catholic Church.

The agreement was to include provision for already married clergymen to continue in the ministry with ordination as Roman Catholic priests to be allowed in keeping with the customary norms and practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Bishop Law serves as the Ecclesiastical Delegate of the Vatican Congregation in questions pertaining to the admission of former Episcopalian clergy into the Catholic priesthood.

NATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR INFORMATION

/more

1312 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W. • WASHINGTON, D. C. 20005

2/Episcopalian Priests

His report on a meeting with officials of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the Vatican last month was sent to all U.S. bishops on March 27.

The Bishop said there are two options for processing the petitions of the priests. The first option is a "pastoral provision" which will allow those who wish to do so to retain some form of common identity as, for example, elements of the Anglican liturgical tradition. Bishop Law said it is his responsibility as Ecclesiastical Delegate to develop the plan for the "pastoral provision" which will be done after Easter with the assistance of several bishop consultants. "In doing so, we will be ecumenically and liturgically sensitive," he wrote. The developed plan must be submitted to the Vatican for review and approval.

The second option is incorporation into the existing structures of Roman Catholic diocese.

Among the points covered in Bishop Law's letter:

--Dossiers on each individual petitioner are to be prepared by the local ordinary and submitted to the Vatican Congregation through the Ecclesiastical Delegate.

--The dossiers must contain basic biographical materials with special attention given to the record of Baptism. While some of the petitioners have been baptized Catholics and some have served as Catholic priests, "the present provisions do not envisage such individuals."

--Care should be taken in reviewing the marital status of the petitioner as well as the health of the marriage and family.

/more

3/Episcopalian Priests

Should the wife not wish to enter the Catholic Church, at least at this time, this should be noted. The judgment of the ordinary on this situation should be given.

--The dossier should refer to the petitioner's spiritual formation and life as well as an assessment of his psychological and emotional state.

--The motive of the petitioner should be carefully reviewed. "Care must be taken to insure that we are responding to a question of faith and that what is involved is an unconditional, sincere desire to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church."

--A record of academic pursuits should be included, as well as a record of work both within and outside the Episcopal Church.

--There should also be included the line of succession supporting the petitioner's priestly ordination in the Episcopal Church. The options for ordination, to be determined by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, will be absolute or conditional.

--Academic preparation leading to absolute or conditional ordination will vary with each individual and might include tutorial as well as more formal study. A written and oral examination to determine academic readiness will be developed by the Ecclesiastical Delegate in consultation with others.

Bishop Law noted in the letter that a number of practical questions may yet need to be resolved but indicated this would be done as expeditiously as possible.

/more

4/Episcopalian Priests

"With the help of consultors, and drawing from the experience of other bishops dealing with this matter, it should be possible to respond to your requests for help and information," he said.

#

X,A,RNW