

## **Dicastery Given Faculties to Penalize Wayward Priests**

### **Clergy Congregation Can Dismiss From Clerical State**

VATICAN CITY, JUNE 5, 2009 (Zenit.org).- There are cases when priests' lack of discipline causes grave scandal and wounds the common good; to help quickly remedy these situations, Benedict XVI has extended the faculties of the Congregation for Clergy.

Archbishop Mauro Piacenza, secretary of that congregation, explained today that the dicastery now has the faculty to treat cases of dismissal from the clerical state "in poenam" (as a penalty) for those clerics who have attempted marriage or have committed other grave sins against the Sixth Commandment.

In an interview with Vatican Radio, the archbishop clarified that "this is not a simplification of procedures or even a simplified procedure, but rather a juridical instrument consistent and coherent with current canon law."

The procedure is nothing automatic, the prelate added, "but rather one which is pursued in certain and very circumscribed cases according to the prudent judgment of the Apostolic See."

The new guidelines also include "the faculty to intervene for the imposition of a just penalty or penance for the external violation of divine or canon law."

When the offender has no intention to reform his life, "perpetual penalties" can be imposed, which could include dismissal from the clerical state.

Finally, the clergy congregation now has the faculty to "declare the loss of the clerical state for clerics who have abandoned the ministry for a period greater than five consecutive years and who persist in such freely chosen and illicit absence from the ministry."

Archbishop Piacenza reiterated: "There is nothing automatic about these procedures, nor is there an automatic timeframe, and each case is considered individually, and applied only for the gravest circumstance."

## Protecting celibacy

The new faculties were announced in an April letter from the prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, to apostolic nuncios. The Pope had made the changes in January.

Archbishop Piacenza noted today that the faculties come from a "desire to honor the mission and the figure of priests who, in this period when secularization is so widely diffused, bear the burden of thinking and acting counterculturally out of fidelity to their proper identity and mission."

The Vatican official affirmed that a priest must have "continuous asceticism in fidelity to the promises made on the day of ordination and respecting the intangible rights of God upon us."

But though celibacy might be difficult, the archbishop affirmed that the "will of the Church with regard to this finds its ultimate motivation in the unique coherence that celibacy has with ordination, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church."

He added: "Indeed, for this reason the Church has reaffirmed at the Second Vatican Council and repeatedly in the subsequent pontifical magisterium the 'firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin rite.'

"Priestly celibacy is a gift the Church has received and wishes to protect, convinced more than ever that it is a gift for herself and for the world."