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Vatican asks bishop to assess Ohio diocese

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CLEVELAND -- The Vatican has asked a retired New Jersey bishop to visit the Diocese of Cleveland and assess the leadership of Bishop Richard G. Lennon at the Ohio bishop's own request.

"While I am confident that I am faithfully handling the responsibilities entrusted to me, I personally made this request earlier this year because a number of persons have written to Rome expressing their concerns about my leadership of the diocese," Bishop Lennon said.

He made the comments in a July 11 statement announcing that Bishop John M. Smith, who headed the Diocese of Trenton from 1997 until his retirement last December, was to spend a week in Cleveland beginning the day the announcement was made.

"This visit will be an opportunity to gather extensive information on all aspects of the activities of the diocese and will allow for an objective assessment of my leadership," Bishop Lennon said. "I ask for prayers that this process will support the vibrancy and vitality of our diocese going forward."

At the conclusion of his visit, the diocese said Bishop Smith was to submit a report to the Vatican; no timetable was announced as to when the Vatican would issue a response.

Bishop Lennon announced a massive reconfiguration plan in 2009 that resulted in the closing of 27 parishes -- most in urban areas -- and the merger of 41 others to form 18 new parishes between March 2009 and June 30, 2010. Parishioners from five closed parishes have written to the Apostolic Signature at the Vatican to appeal the bishop's decision.

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