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Cleveland parishes file motions in Rome demanding their churches reopen

by Brian Roewe

NCR Today

This post has been updated to include today's action by the appealing parishes.

Responding to their bishop's delayed response, three Cleveland parishes have filed motions in Rome requesting the Congregation of the Clergy order the immediate restoration of their parishes and reopening of their churches.

The three are among the 13 parishes who successfully appealed to the congregation Bishop Richard G. Lennon's decision to suppress their parishes and close their churches.

The motions, filed this morning to a congregation official by a canon advocate, read, "The approach of Holy Week creates expectations and apprehensions among the faithful who fear experiencing another Easter far from the parish to which they legitimately belong.

"And while it is understandable and agreed that His Excellency the Bishop should have time to consider the decision regarding his procedural stance, it must be also clear that the decree has immediate effect, restoring the status quo ante."

In a statement dated March 27, Lennon said he is continuing to review the decrees.

He acknowledged receiving the decrees March 14 from the Congregation of the Clergy, who ruled in favor of 13 parishes whom Lennon had suppressed and shuttered their churches. He has 60 days - or until Sunday, May 13 - to appeal the decision to the Vatican's Supreme Court, the Apostolic Signatura.

Some members of the appealing parishes had hoped their churches would be open in time for Holy Week celebrations.

"Bishop Lennon needs to act promptly and decisively adhering to the decrees from the Vatican to restore the parishes and reopen churches for ordinary worship," said Patricia Singleton-Schulte, head of parish advocate group Endangered Catholics, in a statement.

"Not doing so is hurtful and shameful especially as we come upon our most holy time of the liturgical year. We continue to be wrongfully shuttered from our churches."

Lennon's letter is to be distributed at Masses in the diocese this weekend during Palm Sunday Masses.

"I know that many of you have questions about the recent decrees from the Congregation for the Clergy in Rome regarding the closing of certain parishes," the letter begins.

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"As I hope you can appreciate, this is a very complex matter with no easy or perfect solution. With the help of a number of advisors including members of the clergy, laity and experts in church law I am carefully studying and seeking to fully understand the decrees.

"I can assure you that this is not nearly as clear-cut as it may appear on the surface. Although the decrees are brief in length, they are deep in under-lying meaning and I continue to receive significant input and clarification," Lennon wrote.

The Cleveland bishop restated he has yet to make a decision, and urged "no one should speculate or try to read anything between the lines of my message to you today."

Lennon added he intends to share his rationale regarding his eventual action, assuring that it will be in full accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church and with the utmost respect for its governance and authority.

For more coverage on the Cleveland parishes:

- Cleveland bishop to mull parish reopenings while celebrations go ahead (March 15, 2012)
- Cleveland parishes await Lennon's response (March 12, 2012)
- Cleveland parish remains a community of a different sort (March 5, 2012)

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