

Dear Monsignor Gobitas,

Your letter about the Diocese of Allentown's decision to employ the 2009 Congregation of the Clergy procedure for involuntary laicization came as a surprise. Please know that I do not support the application Bishop Barres has sent or will send to Rome. I will, in fact, strongly oppose it if contacted by Rome.

Cardinal Hummes said about the involuntary laicization allowed by the decree that if the one who left is not interested in regularizing his situation, the good of the church and the good of the priest who left is that he be dispensed so that he would be in a correct situation, especially if he has children. If he has children, the cardinal went on, his children have a right to have a father who is in a correct situation in the eyes of God and with his own conscience, so helping these people is one of the reasons there are new procedures.

That strikes me as so self-serving. Think about it.

My life with my wife and children as well as my life and ministry within the Episcopal Church, before and after my reception here as a priest, suggest that I am "in a correct situation in the eyes of God." Among the sayings and teachings of Jesus that Matthew collected in what we have come to know as the Sermon on the Mount is: By their fruits you will know them. Didn't Jesus say that so much clearer than any Roman decree?

My conscience is clear. My wife and children love me. We have had a good and holy life together. I need no paperwork from Rome to make that so. Actually, this

would not be a matter of the church helping me in any way. In a way stranger than I can fathom, it is rather a matter of the bureaucracy of the church simply reorganizing its files, balancing its own books, making things neater for itself.

A story is told locally about a priest of the Diocese of Allentown interviewing an Eastern Rite priest long ago to make the case for an annulment of a parishioner's marriage. Having been quite cooperative during the interview, the interviewee is said to have remarked at the end: When are you guys going to stop playing cops and robbers, and start preaching the word?

However it may be cast, the end of this involuntary laicization procedure, so long as I do not consent to it, would be a gratuitous penalty, a defrocking of clothes I haven't worn for 31 years. My surprise in receiving word of this is that it seeks a late-have-I-loved-thee penalty that helps no one. Thirty-one years! On the eve of the approaching golden anniversary of my 1963 ordination in Rome? Why now? Rome does not require this. Why has the Diocese of Allentown chosen to pursue it? It would make a good story.

Monsignor Gobitas, you are someone about whom I have always thought highly. I regret that you have to be the messenger of a truly unnecessary mess of the church's own making.

FYI, a fact check; (1) Because the Episcopal Church recognizes ordination by the Roman Catholic Church and simply "receives" former Roman Catholic priests in a ceremony far removed from ordination, I was not

"ordained" into the priesthood of the Episcopal Church. My only ordination is that as a Roman Catholic priest. (2) Though I became a member of the Episcopal Church in 1982, my reception as a priest of the Episcopal Church took place not 24 years ago, as your letter states, but on Nov. 1, 1999. (3) My middle initial is E, not V.

Thanks,
Bill

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*Be attentive. Be intelligent. Be reasonable. Be responsible.
Be in Love. And, if necessary, change. [Bernard Lonergan]*