

Archbishop Burke starts process to dismiss priest

ST. LOUIS - Archbishop Raymond L. Burke of St. Louis said March 5 that he must proceed with the canonical process of dismissing dissident priest Father Marek Bozek from the clerical state because he has refused to return to his home diocese to be reconciled with the Catholic Church.

A priest of the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Father Bozek was suspended in December 2005 by his bishop for abandoning his assignment and his diocese to take a job as pastor offered to him by St. Stanislaus Kostka Corp. at its church in St. Louis.

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish was suppressed by the archdiocese over the governing board's refusal to bring parish structures into conformity with canon law. The corporation that runs it is considered to be functioning outside the communion of the church.

In December 2005, Archbishop Burke declared that the six members of the lay board and Father Bozek were excommunicated.

On March 5 Father Bozek was scheduled to attend a hearing with Archbishop Burke and two canon lawyers assessing the case. In a press conference just before the meeting, the Polish-born priest announced that he would not attend.

Earlier Archbishop Burke said he has heard from Catholics who are concerned about the sacraments they are receiving from Father Bozek. Because of the priest's status, any sacraments of penance and confirmation he performed or any marriages he has witnessed are considered invalid.

In addition, Father Bozek participated in the attempted ordination of two women and has been making statements contrary to church teachings, according to archdiocesan officials.

“The conclusion of today’s meeting,” Archbishop Burke said March 5, “is that Father Bozek was found to have committed eight canonical delicts,” which are ecclesiastical crimes.

“The priest also was accused of a ninth one” that will be handled in a judicial penal trial so that the penalty of the dismissal from the clerical state can be considered, the archbishop said.

He described the offense as breaking communion with the church - its teachings, sacraments and governance.

It is a “truly lamentable situation,” Archbishop Burke said, and the actions have “led many of the faithful in error regarding the church’s teachings and sacraments.”

“From the minute he came to this archdiocese I have been praying that he would be reconciled, and I continue to pray for the sake of his own salvation and also for the sake of so many led astray by Father Bozek,” he said.

Archbishop Burke met with him Feb. 5 to urge him to return to his home diocese and seek reconciliation.

Father Bozek has the right to a canonical penal trial, during which the Archdiocese of St. Louis will present proof that the priest’s actions require his dismissal from the clerical state. Father Bozek will have the right to present his defense and use the services of an approved canon lawyer.

The process will be conducted by three judges, who, by church law, are required to

be priests who are experts in canon law.

The judges will be appointed by the archbishop. The archbishop has already assured Father Bozek that all three will be from outside the archdiocese and the province of St. Louis, which covers the whole state of Missouri.

After deliberating the facts, the judges will render a decision. Depending on the decision, the archbishop can impose a penalty, which includes asking for Father Bozek to be dismissed from the clerical state. If that happens, the decision will have to be ratified by the Holy See, through the Roman Rota, which is the appellate judicial court of the Catholic Church.

Both sides can appeal the decision of the three judges.