NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

# Relaxed rules on ex-priests not imminent, Vatican official says

John L. Allen Jr. | Nov. 2, 2011

Cardinal Ivan Dias, former prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, center, concelebrates Mass at the La Vang Basilica in Vietnam's central Quang Tri province in January. Dias said laicized priests could soon play a greater role in local parishes. (CNS photo/Kham, Reuters)

Recent reports about a possible relaxation of church rules to allow former priests to play greater roles in parish life represent more of a hypothesis than an imminent development, a senior Vatican official told *NCR* in late October.

Even if those changes do eventually take place, the official cautioned, they would not indicate any broader movement toward a reconsideration of priestly celibacy.

Speculation about possible revisions in the rules concerning former priests who have been laicized, generally in order to get married, was triggered in late September by publication of a letter from Indian Cardinal Ivan Dias, former prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. In it, Dias expressed optimism that laicized priests would soon be able to play a greater role in the life of local parishes.

Writing to an Australian missionary society, Dias suggested that rules restricting the ability of laicized priests to teach in Catholic schools, to administer communion as a lay person and to be active in the life of a parish might be relaxed at the discretion of a local bishop. Other restrictions that apply to all lay people, such as a prohibition against celebrating the sacraments or delivering homilies, would presumably remain in force.

Dias, 75, resigned in May as head of the Vatican's missionary department. The letter about laicized priests was dated in February, while he was still in office. Extracts from the letter were published in late September by the *Catholic Herald* in the United Kingdom.

A senior official told *NCR* in October that while such modifications have been discussed within the Vatican, they're not on the brink of being formally issued. He added, however, that the restrictions currently in church law contain some degree of flexibility, and that bishops already can set policies in their dioceses in terms of how they're interpreted; for instance, on how much involvement in parish life is appropriate.

In the meantime, all indications are that the Vatican remains committed to the discipline of celibacy for priests.

In mid-October, the Catholic press agency "Aci Prensa" asked Italian Cardinal Mauro Piacenza, prefect of the

Congregation for the Clergy, about proposed reforms such as a married priesthood.

Such reforms, Piacenza said, would "terribly aggravate the problems" facing the priesthood, and would "follow a logic contrary to that of the Gospel."

"The tone should not be lowered, but rather raised; that's the path to follow," he said. "If the climb is hard, you have to take vitamins, you have to get into shape, and, strongly motivated, you climb with great joy of heart."

Piacenza likewise rejected any opening on women priests.

"Apostolic tradition is unequivocally, absolutely clear," he said. "The great and uninterrupted ecclesial tradition has always recognized that the church has not received from Christ the power to confer ordination on women."

---

**Source URL (retrieved on *08/29/2016 - 01:56*):** https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/relaxed-rules-ex-priests-not-imminent-vatican-official-says?splash=