

March 17, 2011

Most Rev. J. Kevin Boland
AOS Bishop Promoter
Diocese of Savannah
60 Dolan Drive
Savannah, GA 31406-5202

Dear Bishop Boland,

I am the Cruise Ship Priest Representative to the AOS USA Administrative Board, and chairman of the AOS USA Cruise Ship Priest Committee. I regret not having met you yet, but I have to write you about the continued uncertainty regarding the Cruise Ship Priest Program.

Celebrity Cruises has drastically cut back on the number of cruises that they are staffing with Catholic priests from AOS-USA, which has a major impact on the revenue coming into the offices of AOS-USA.

At our May meeting in Niagara Falls I proposed that we raise the dues to be an authorized Cruise Ship Priest from \$60 to \$100. We also decided to actively pursue having Travel Agents utilize the AOS-USA Priests when trying to secure a priest for tours they were sponsoring. We also have worked hard to reduce our overhead in the Port Arthur office, downsizing the employee who helped the Secretary General during the end-of-the-year rush of Priest Renewals, and the employee who handled cruise assignments and boarding letters. We have been good stewards, but there is little left to cut from our Cruise Ship Priest Program's operations, and we are still coming up in the red.

AOS USA needs clarification on how it is to function as the Agent for the USCCB's Cruise Ship Priest Program, and how the costs of operating this program will be covered.

This issue began in December 2009. No solutions were forthcoming by mid 2010. However, AOS USA agreed to continue the program for the year 2011, while the Ad Hoc Committee studied this issue. In October of 2010, we were told by the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity that there would be an answer by the middle of January, 2011. We have been patiently waiting and now it is the middle of March and we have been given no further information.

If the Bishops' Conference decides to have another organization act as their agent, or has no means of covering the operational deficit, then we will need to give the Secretary General, Doreen Badeaux, notice of the closing of the office and the end of her job, giving her sufficient time to seek other gainful employment. She would likely go back to the field of Education, and would need to begin a new job in July.

If the entire Cruise Ship Priest Program is to fold, we must also notify the Cruise Lines that we will no longer be able to provide priests to them who are in good standing, and are serving with the permission of their competent authority. One of our cruise lines begins priest assignments as early as April and May of the year prior, and in all fairness to them, we must be able to tell them if we will be able to complete this process for them, or whether they should begin contracting with another company to fill these positions.

Sadly, if this is the case, we will have to inform them that none of the manning agencies that provide clergy have a screening and reporting process such as our program. We will not be able to refer them to any other agency in good conscience. However, these other manning agencies will certainly begin to fill the void of the Cruise Ship Priest Program, and the situation onboard will revert back to the days of Rent-A-Priests and schismatics onboard.

We must also contact all of our Cruise Ship Priests to let them know that the program will be discontinued at the end of 2011.

Finally, if the USCCB intends to enlist a new Agency to handle the Cruise Ship Priest Program on it's behalf, AOS USA will need time to make the transfer of information.

I am sorry to write this letter that sounds so dire, but it is a dire situation, and decisions must be made at our upcoming Annual Meeting in May of 2011.

Sincerely,



Rev. Arthur B. Schute
AOS USA Cruise Ship Priest Board Representative
2500 Harbor Blvd.
Port Charlotte, FL 33952

Cc: Sr. Myrna Tordillo
Fr. Allen Deck, SJ
Fr. Sinclair K. Oubre, JCL ✓