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## **CANONICAL STATUS OF THE SO-CALLED BISHOPS OF PIDHIRCI**

Vatican City, 29 March 2012 (VIS) - Given below is the text of a declaration issued today by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning the canonical status of the "so-called Greek-Catholic bishops of Pidhirci": Fr. Elias A. Dohnal O.S.B.M., Fr. Markian V. Hitiuk O.S.B.M., Fr. Metodej R. Spirik O.S.B.M., and Fr. Robert Oberhauser. The text is dated 22 February and bears the signatures of Cardinal William Joseph Levada and Archbishop Luis Francisco Ladaria Ferrer S.J., respectively prefect and secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

(1) The Holy See has followed with great concern the activities of Fr. Elias A. Dohnal O.S.B.M., Fr. Markian V. Hitiuk O.S.B.M., Fr. Metodej R. Spirik O.S.B.M., and Fr. Robert Oberhauser who, having been expelled from the Basilian Order of St. Josaphat, subsequently proclaimed themselves as bishops of the Greek-Catholic Ukrainian Church. With their disobedience, these priests continue to challenge ecclesiastical authority, causing moral and spiritual damage, not only to the Basilian Order of St. Josaphat and the Greek-Catholic Ukrainian Church, but also to this Apostolic See and the Catholic Church as a whole. All this provokes division and bewilderment among the faithful. The aforementioned priests, having established a group of "bishops" of Pidhirci, have recently sought to have that group recognised and registered by the competent State authorities as the "Ukrainian Orthodox Greek-Catholic Church".

(2) Since the beginning of this painful episode, Church representatives of various ranks have sought to dissuade them from continuing a conduct which, among other things, could deceive the faithful, as has already happened in a number of cases.

(3) The Holy See, concerned to protect the unity and peace of Christ's flock, had hoped in the repentance and subsequent return of the aforementioned priests to full communion with the Catholic Church. Unfortunately the most recent developments - such as the unsuccessful attempt to acquire State registration for the "Pidhirci" group under the name of the "Ukrainian Orthodox Greek-Catholic Church" - demonstrates their continuing disobedience.

(4) Therefore, to safeguard the common good of the Church and the "salus animarum", and given that the so-called "bishops" of Pidhirci show no sign of repentance but continue to create confusion and disarray in the community of faithful, in particular by calumniating representatives of the Holy See and of the local Church, and asserting that the supreme authority of the Church is in possession of documentation testifying to the full validity of their episcopal ordination, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,

accepting the request presented by the ecclesiastical authorities of the Greek-Catholic Ukrainian Church, and by other dicasteries of the Holy See, has decided, by this declaration, to inform the faithful, especially in the countries of origin of the so-called "bishops", about their current canonical status.

(5) This Congregation, disassociating itself entirely from the actions of the so-called "bishops" aforementioned, and from their aforesaid declarations, formally declares that it does not recognise the validity of their episcopal ordinations, or of any and all ordinations that have derived, or will derive therefrom. Moreover, the canonical status of the four so-called "bishops" is that of excommunication, pursuant to canon 1459 para. 1 of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO), in view of the fact that an appeal sentence of the ordinary tribunal of the Major Archiepiscopal Ukrainian Church, issued on 10 September 2008, recognised them as guilty of offences under canons 1462, 1447 and 1452 of the CCEO; i.e., the offences of illegitimate usurpation of office, inciting sedition and hatred towards certain hierarchs, provoking subjects to disobedience, and harming a third party's good name by calumny.

(6) Furthermore, the use of the name "Catholic" by groups which are not recognised by the competent ecclesiastical authority is to be considered as illegitimate, pursuant to canon 19 of the CCEO.

(7) The faithful are, then, enjoined not to adhere to the aforementioned group as, to all canonical effects, it is outside ecclesiastical communion. The faithful are invited to pray for the members of the group, that they may repent and return to full communion with the Catholic Church.