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### **To whom it may concern**

For some three and a half years I was an official at the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei (PCED), working on the “English desk” of the said Commission, which existed under the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In that time I was responsible for the liaison of my superior, Archbishop Guido Pozzo, with the Diocesan Bishops and Religious Superiors who had issues pertaining to the *Usus Antiquior* of the Catholic Mass.

During my time at the Commission, and because I had been Chaplain of the Sisters of St. Benedict Centre in Still River MA, I had come to know of the situation of the St. Benedict Centre Brothers and Sisters living in Richmond, New Hampshire. I had realised that their situation was, in the least, anomalous, and ought to be corrected so that they could enjoy having full canonical recognition of their way of life in the Catholic Church, as indeed would be compatible with their long-lived way of life and belief. I raised this with my Superior who raised it also with the then Prefect and Cardinal Cardinal Levada, who knew of the community in general and was in favour of approaching the Bishop to resolve the situation.

As a result, initial efforts were made to correspond with Bishop McCormack, of the Diocese of Manchester New Hampshire, and were met with, not surprising, good will on the Bishop’s part. Indeed, if I recall, a meeting was established with the then, and present, superior of the Community, Brother André, and the result was that the Bishop wrote, as best I recall, to the PCED seeking guidance in the matter. It was recommended by the PCED that the good Bishop would:

1. Permit to the community a priest for Mass and Confession - I believe a priest was appointed immediately;
2. Set up the chapel of the community as a public oratory (which, I believe was not done, regardless of the PCED’s instructions); and
3. Erect the fledgling institute as a public association of the faithful, with a view, after a period of *ad experimentum* existence of being established as a Diocesan institute with the right to have members ordained as priests.

I am not aware that all of these matters were progressed but, my recollection is that they were on the way to being done when a new Bishop was appointed in Manchester. To the extent that I recall, the new Bishop seemed initially in support of all of the above recommendations of the PCED, but that as time went on the Bishop changed his opinion, without informing the PCED of this change or giving any indication to the PCED on his part of any grave motives for doing so. It also appears that certain priests within the Diocese, for whatever reason, continued to convince the Bishop that, despite clear instructions from Rome, the community should not enjoy some of these benefits

customary to developing religious communities. Again, as far as I recall, the reason for these changes on the part of the Bishop were not made known to the PCED.

Many of these, my own individual recollections, would be able to be confirmed by access to the archives and the relevant file on the community retained in the PCED archives, but those files are probably now subject to the Secret Archives provisions, and would not be easily accessed, also because the Pontifical Commission was recently suppressed by Pope Francis.

To the extent that it might be helpful to you, I remain willing and able to witness to these recollections verbally with any priest or relevant Diocesan official.

With kind regards,

Fr. Mark Withoos

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(Former) Official of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments

(Former) Official of the Pontifical Commission Ecclesia Dei in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

(Former) Secretary to the Prefect of the Secretariat for the Economy, George Card. Pell.