

MOSTARSKO-DUVANJSKA I TREBINJSKO-MRKANSKA BISKUPIJA
BISKUPSKI ORDINARIJAT MOSTAR

Ulica nadbiskupa Cule bb., pp. 54 - 88000 MOSTAR
(tel. ++387/36/331-469; fax: 331-472; e-mail: biskupija@cbismo.hr)

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PRESS RELEASE

FR. RANIERO CANTALAMESSA O.F.M. CAP.
WILL NOT DIRECT SPIRITUAL RETREAT IN MEDJUGORJE

In order to avoid repeating abuses that have occurred in the past, for almost six years now a decision of the Diocesan Chancery of Mostar in the form of a circular letter dated 23 August 2001, has been in force and sent to all the parish rectories and communities of Religious men and women which declares: "3. - All Parish rectories and Religious institutions are obliged to forward to this Diocesan Chancery in due time, the names of all foreign priests and bishops coming from beyond the areas where the Croatian language is spoken, who have been invited to hold spiritual retreats, seminars and similar spiritual encounters, in which the Word of God is preached and explained. Along with the name(s) and the request, a copy of the *celebret* of the priest or bishop must be included, who after having received written permission from this Diocesan Chancery, will be allowed to hold such spiritual exercises" (NEWS. Catholic Press Agency of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina, 5 September 2001, pp. 30-31; *Glas Koncila*, 9 September 2001, p.2).

Even the bishops of the Croatian Bishops' Conference during the assembly held in Split in October 2005 decided and this decision was then also adopted by the Bishops of the Bishops' Conference of Bosnia-Herzegovina in Sarajevo the same month, that the bishops of the two Bishops' Conferences shall not accept the invitations of individual pastors to celebrate the sacraments and hold lectures in the territory of another diocese unless they have received a *Nihil obstat* from the local Diocesan Chancery.

Despite the above mentioned decision, the news of a spiritual retreat for priests directed by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa OFM Cap., Preacher of the Papal Household, to be held in Medjugorje at the beginning of July 2007 appeared on the internet many months ago, yet the organizers of this retreat did not inform the Diocesan Chancery in Mostar according to the norm, prior to the event. In this regard, celebrations of the sacrament of reconciliation are being publicized billing, alongside Fr Cantalamessa, Fr. Jozo Zovko; yet the latter since 2004 has been relieved of all priestly faculties in the territory of the dioceses of Herzegovina (*Vrhbosna*, 3/2004, pp.293-298).

The Pastoral decision of 23 August 2001 regarding leaders of spiritual retreats and conferences was reaffirmed and expressly emphasized by the Bishop of Mostar-Duvno, Msgr. Ratko Perić in his discourse and invitation given during the Chapter elections on 16 April this year at Humac, where he was officially invited to preside at Holy Mass. On that occasion the Diocesan bishop mentioned the following regarding Medjugorje:

“1 – The pastoral obstinacy of the pastors and other associates of Medjugorje is quite evident on the ‘Medjugorje’ internet site which bears the title ‘Marian Shrine’. ‘Medjugorje’ is neither a diocesan nor national or international shrine. This status must be acknowledged while the events remain as they stand.

2 - The obstinacy of the pastors and other associates of Medjugorje is also evident in their disregard for the circular letter of the Chancery of 2001, which states that priests coming from beyond the areas where the Croatian language is spoken are not to be invited without the express and written permission of the Diocesan Chancery.

3 - The obstinacy of the pastors and other associates of Medjugorje is evident in that a member of your Province, Fr. Jozo Zovko, who has no priestly faculties and who is forbidden from celebrating any priestly functions in this diocese, has been invited this year to preside at the Way of the Cross in Medjugorje and has been in this regard presented as available for confessions”.

The discourse was published in its entirety at the beginning of May this year in the diocesan pastoral monthly (*Crkva na kamenu*, 5/2007, pp. 33-35).

After exchanging various letters between the Diocesan Chancery and the Parish Rectory of Medjugorje, the pastor of Medjugorje Fr. Ivan Sesar notified the bishop in his letter dated 13 June 2007 that: “Upon my insistence due to the shortness of time, I asked P. Cantalamessa to send his acknowledgment of receipt of my letter by fax, which he did in the meantime. He accepts my apology and regrets that due to the newly arisen circumstances he cannot come, since in principle he never does public appearances without the permission of the local Ordinary”.

Bishop Perić and Fr. Cantalamessa exchanged letters on 13 June. Fr. Cantalamessa informed the bishop that he wrote a letter to Fr. Sesar on 8 June. Fr. Cantalamessa wrote in his letter to the bishop on 13 June: “My principle is not to preach, especially not to the clergy, without the permission of the local bishop”.

This Diocesan Chancery never received any written request for permission as is the norm, from either of the parties involved with regard to the spiritual retreat and its moderator.

With this Press Release the Diocesan Chancery wishes to emphasize that the norms of the *Code of Canon Law* have not been respected in this case, which state that express permission for priests and deacons is required for preaching if this is demanded by local law, as well as observance of the norms issued by the Diocesan bishop. The Diocesan Chancery also particularly deems necessary to release this to the Catholic public in order to avoid misinterpretations and deceptions which can be seen in the comments on the web sites that regard Medjugorje as a place of supposed apparitions for which the position of the Church remains: “that it cannot be affirmed that these events concern supernatural apparitions and revelations”.

Msgr. Srećko Majić
Vicar General