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**Apostolic Letter in the form of a Motu Proprio, “Learning to take leave”, governing the resignation, for reason of age, of the holders of certain offices by papal appointment**

“Learning to take leave”, is what I advised, commenting on a reading from the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 20: 17-27), in a prayer for pastors (cf. *Homily in Mass at Santa Marta*, 30 May 2017). The conclusion of an ecclesial office must be considered an integral part of the service itself, as it requires a new form of willingness.

This inner attitude is necessary both when, for reasons of age, one must prepare oneself to leave office, and also when asked to continue that service for a longer period, even though the age of seventy-five has been reached (cf. Address to the Rectors and Students of the Pontifical Colleges and Residences of Rome, 12 May 2014).

Those who are preparing to present their resignation need to prepare themselves adequately before God, stripping themselves of the desires for power and the pretence at being indispensable. This will allow us to pass with peace and confidence through this moment, which could otherwise be painful and conflictual. At the same time, whoever takes on in truth this need to take leave must discern in prayer how to live the stage that is about to begin, developing a new project of life, characterized as far as possible by austerity, humility, prayer of intercession, time dedicated to reading and willingness to provide simple pastoral services.

On the other hand, if exceptionally you are asked to continue the service for a longer period, this means abandoning, with generosity, one’s own new personal project. This situation, however, should not be considered as a privilege, or a personal triumph, or a favour due to presumed obligations derived from friendship or closeness, nor as gratitude for the effectiveness of the services provided. Any possible extension can be understood only for certain reasons always linked to the common ecclesial good. This pontifical decision is not an automatic act but an act of governance; consequently it implies the virtue of prudence which will help, through adequate discernment, to make the appropriate decision.

I cite merely as an example some possible reasons: the importance of adequately completing a very fruitful project for the Church; the convenience of ensuring the continuity of important works; difficulties related to the composition of the Dicastery in a period of transition; the importance of the contribution that the person may make to the application of directives recently issued by the Holy See, or to the reception of new magisterial

guidelines.

With the provisions on the resignation of diocesan bishops and the holders of offices of papal appointment, contained in the *Rescriptum ex audiencia* of 3 November 2014, submitted to the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, I wished to supplement the canonical legislation and provide some modifications, which I confirm in full, with the exception of the parts that are explicitly reformed by the following provisions.

Given the generous commitment shown and the precious experience accumulated by those who have exercised certain positions of particular responsibility for several years, both in the particular Churches and in the Roman Curia or in the Pontifical Representations, I have become aware of the need to update the rules concerning the times and methods of resigning from office due to age limits. After carrying out the necessary consultations, I consider it necessary to proceed as follows:

- a. to establish some clarification of Art. 2 of the aforementioned *Rescriptum*, concerning diocesan bishops, coadjutor bishops and auxiliaries (see canons 401-402 and 411 CIC and 210-211, 218, 213 CCEO);
- b. to modify the canonical norms concerning resignation from office for reasons of age, by the non-cardinal Dicastery heads and the superior prelates of the Roman Curia (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, 28 June 1980, Article 5 § 2: AAS 80 [1988], 860, General Regulations of the Roman Curia, 1999, Article 3, *Rescriptum ex audiencia*, 3 November 2014, Article 7), by bishops who hold other offices of pontifical nomination (see *Rescriptum ex audiencia*, 3 November 2014, 7) and of the Pontifical Representatives (see CIP 367, General Regulations of the Roman Curia, 1999, Article 8, § 2), Regulations for the Pontifical Representations, 2003, art 20, § 1).

With the present Motu Proprio I establish that:

Art. 1. At the age of seventy-five, diocesan and eparchical bishops, and those who are equivalent in accordance with canons 381 § 2 CIC and 313 CCEO, as well as coadjutor and auxiliary bishops or holders with special pastoral duties, are invited to present their resignation from pastoral office to the Supreme Pontiff.

Art. 2. Upon arriving at the age of seventy-five years, the non-cardinal heads of Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, the superior prelates of the Roman Curia and the bishops who hold other offices within the Holy See will not terminate their service *ipso facto*, but must present their resignation to the Supreme Pontiff.

Art. 3. In the same way, the Pontifical Representatives will not cease *ipso facto* to hold office upon reaching seventy-five years of age, but in this circumstance must present their resignation to the Supreme Pontiff.

Art. 4. To be effective, resignation presented in accordance with Articles 1-3 must be accepted by the Holy Father, who will decide on the basis of the specific circumstances.

Art. 5. Once resignation has been presented, the office referred to in Articles 1-3 shall be deemed to be extended until that the acceptance of the resignation or the extension of the office for a fixed or indefinite period, has been communicated to the interested party, on the contrary to the general terms established in canons 189 § 3 CIC and 970 § 1 CCEO.

All that I have deliberated by this Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio*, I order be observed in all its parts, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and I establish that it be promulgated by publication in *L'Osservatore Romano*, entering into force on the same day of promulgation and that thereafter it be published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 12 February 2018, the fifth Year of my Pontificate.

