



DISPENSATIONS: EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULES, PART 2

Continuing our discussion from last issue on the subject of dispensations, we turn now to dispensations properly speaking. A dispensation is the relaxation of a law in a particular case for a just and reasonable cause by a person with the authority to do so. Each part of this definition is essential, so I will examine each in turn.

Laws exist to protect or promote something good, such as the sanctity of marriage. Therefore, a relaxation of the law always threatens to harm something good. In theory, this is done in favor of accomplishing a greater good, but in practice, it still creates the potential for harm. That is the reason for the other parts of the definition.

Dispensations are only given for a particular case and never generally. In marriages, this means they are given for a specific person for a specific marriage to another specific person.

Dispensations also usually come with an expiration date. In our diocese, it is six months, after which, if it has not been used, a new dispensation must be sought.

Dispensations require a just and reasonable cause, that is, one that satisfies the demands of justice and reason. That means, among other things, that the reasons for a dispensation must be true, relevant, and proportional to the potential harm it may cause. The reasons for requesting the dispensation should be included on the M-A form.

Out of the Local Ordinary

The last part of the definition is the person who has the authority to grant a dispensation and who is responsible for making sure that all of the requirements are met. For most marriage dispensations, it is the local ordinary, which includes the diocesan bishop, the vicar general (Msgr. Edward Lohse), and other episcopal vicars (Msgr. Richard Siefer and Fr. Richard Allen) within the boundaries of their vicariates. Bishop Persico has also delegated certain other priests, primarily Msgr. Daniel Magraw, to grant marriage dispensations. Fr. Marc Stockton and Fr. Christopher Singer can also grant them in a pinch.

Those are the people in our diocese who can grant dispensations, but to whom can they grant them? The local ordinary only has authority over those who live within his diocese or those physically present in the diocese. This means that, if the Catholic parties whom you are preparing for marriage live in another diocese, they must request any dispensations from the local ordinary of that diocese. But let's say, hypothetically (of course), that you somehow forgot to get a needed dispensation before the wedding day. What now? In that situation, because they are now physically present in our diocese, we could grant the dispensation. To avoid such drama, please make sure that, regardless of where the parties live, *all* requests for dispensations are sent to our tribunal office well in advance. We will determine where the request needs to go and make sure it gets there.

That's it for dispensations. Tune in next time when we shift gears to explore petitions for annulments. Until then, keep the faith, love God's people, and always honor the code!

