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Jesuit gets OK for Nixon duty

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BOSTON — The Rev. John McLaughlin will be allowed to keep his job as a White House speech writer, his religious superior said yesterday, but he will have to take time off every year for prayer and reflection.

Father McLaughlin, 47, a Jesuit, got in trouble with his order when he defended President Nixon's frequent use of profanity in the White House Watergate transcripts.

The Very Rev. Robert Cleary, Jesuit provincial of New England, called McLaughlin back to Boston last week for an eight-day spiritual retreat.

"Father McLaughlin and I have talked and reflected together, and individually prayed over these matters raised in recent weeks," Cleary said yesterday. "I have decided with Father McLaughlin that he will fulfill this annual spiritual requirement when his schedule permits."

He added, "Father McLaughlin's work with the government has certain unique aspects which may require a degree of flexibility in his living. I am now

satisfied that, although this flexibility is not normative, it is permissible, given his special situation."

"I should like to stress again that Father McLaughlin is a Jesuit priest in good standing in the Society of Jesus," Rev. Cleary said.

Father McLaughlin said in a statement issued through his secretary at the White House: "Father Cleary's statement speaks for itself."

In Orlando, Fla., earlier yesterday, McLaughlin predicted that President Nixon will not be impeached because a majority of the House will demand evidence of guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt, not probable cause."

McLaughlin joined the White House staff in 1971 after an unsuccessful race for the U.S. Senate against Sen. John Pastore, D-R.I.

In his speech to the Florida Republican Executive Committee, McLaughlin said the impeachment proceedings against Nixon were politically motivated, and suggested that the House Judiciary Committee is keeping its hearings closed to the public because there is no real evidence.