

FIFTY FACTS AND INSIGHTS ABOUT PRIESTS WHO MARRY

Presented for Continuing Discussion and Action

FOREWORD

Should parishes be closed because no celibate priests are available to staff them? What does the Bible say about celibacy as a requirement for priesthood? How do priests feel about having the option to marry? Does the Church provide a pension for priests who serve thirty years and then marry?

The answers to these and other questions regarding celibacy and the priesthood appear in this publication from CORPUS, the Corps of Reserve Priests United for Service, an international body of resigned/married priests desirous of continuing officially recognized ministry in the Roman Catholic Church.

We are a CORPS because we have been seeking and contacting one another, a body of 1300 so far, who have been drawing together and making our common voice heard. Each of us has signed "the CORPUS Statement," an affirmation of personal readiness to resume regular active ministry in the Church whenever the bishops are willing to use our services again.

We consider ourselves priests in RESERVE due to the Western Church's present regulations. As the number of celibate priests and seminarians decreases, reserves will become increasingly important, we believe, for the Church and the spiritual life of the people.

We remain PRIESTS, as the Council of Trent has defined: "Once a priest, always a priest." Pope John Paul II has said that the Lord who has given a call will not take it away. While in the United States in 1979, he said to priests, quoting Psalm 110:4 and the Letter to the Hebrews 5:6: "Priests forever!"

We are UNITED FOR SERVICE because service is part of our vocation as priests in the ministry for which we were ordained in the Roman Catholic Church.

I. CURRENT SITUATION

1. In recent years more than 12,000 priests in the United States have resigned their Church assignments and have married.
2. Today one of every six American Catholic priests is married.
3. One of every three American priests under the age of fifty is married.
4. By 1989 41% of the celibate priests in our country will be at least 55 years old.
5. Typical Church press releases on the vocation crisis seem never to acknowledge but studiously to avoid the above statistics.
6. More than half of the 59,000 celibate priests in the United States believe celibacy should be optional.
7. Surveys indicate it is not true that all celibate priests would marry if the Church permitted it.

8. The majority of celibate priests now working in parishes across the country favor the resumption of priestly ministry by married priests.
9. National opinion polls indicate the majority of American Catholics favor a clergy which would include both married and unmarried priests.
10. The National Federation of Priests' Councils, in a 1975 resolution, supports the full utilization of married priests in America: "There are large numbers of resigned priests who desire to exercise full priestly ministry. We support their desire, which we see as based on the very nature of the priesthood of Jesus Christ and the greatest pastoral needs of our time."
11. The Detroit Call to Action Conference (a 1976 assembly of 1340 official representatives of 155 dioceses, including 110 bishops) called for the American bishops to petition Rome to change the present law on celibacy.
12. The National Conference of Diocesan Vocation Directors has called for the use of the talents of married priests in an official ministry.
13. Other major Christian denominations have a surplus of clergy whereas the Catholic Church has a serious shortage.
14. Parishes are closing in many areas due to a shortage of priests, and in some places the people are deprived of Sunday Mass. Parishioners are questioning their bishops whether the law of mandatory celibacy is more important than the Church's evangelical mission and the people's spiritual needs.
15. The Catholic Church is forfeiting hospital chaplaincy and military chaplaincy positions to Protestant ministers because of the shortage of celibate priests.

II. SACRED SCRIPTURE

16. There is not a single text in the Bible which specifies that priests cannot marry.
17. Jesus chose married men to be among his apostles, and he did not demand celibacy of them or of any others among his disciples.
18. In various scriptural accounts, whenever Jesus faced a conflict between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and a law made by man, he did not allow such a law to block the work of the Spirit.
19. St. Paul speaks of the apostles' right to marry: "Do we not have the right to marry a believing woman like the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?" (1 Cor. 9:5, NAB).
20. The New Testament speaks of bishops as being married (1 Tm. 3:2) and cites the bishop's guidance of his family as a model for his guidance of the church (1 Tm. 3:4).

III. HISTORY AND TRADITION

21. St. Peter was married (Mt. 8:14), and so were many other popes, bishops and countless priests in earlier centuries.
22. The Church had its greatest period of growth when celibacy was not required of all priests.
23. There is a shorter tradition in the Church's Western (Latin) rite for an all-celibate clergy than there is for a clergy which is both married and unmarried.
24. In the twelfth century celibacy became a requirement for diocesan priests in parish ministry in imitation of the ancient practice required of monks living in religious communities.
25. There are married priests at the present time actively functioning in both the Eastern and Western rites of the Catholic Church, (mostly in the Eastern), in full accord with Church law.
26. Many thousands of priests received permission to marry under the successive pontificates of Popes Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul I, but only on condition of resigning their ministry.
27. In 1969 the National Conference of Catholic Bishops expressed concern that resigned priests' "talents and education not be lost to the Church and the human community."
28. In 1973 the American Bishops' Committee for Priestly Life and Ministry recommended the utilization of priests who have married, but little action followed that recommendation.

29. Optional celibacy is as much a concern to women as it is to men, perhaps more so, because the present legislation makes marriage secondary to priesthood.

IV. CHURCH LAW

30. There is no such thing as an "ex-priest." The Council of Trent has defined: "If anyone says that he who was once a priest can become a layman again, let him be anathema."
31. The United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights includes the right to marry, but the Catholic Church imposes severe penalties on priests who exercise this basic human right.
32. Even though recent Popes have spoken out against a change in the law of celibacy, Catholics are still free to discuss the issue and to articulate their concerns.
33. In contrast to priests who live in religious communities, diocesan priests do not take a vow to forego marriage, contrary to what many lay people may think. They simply promise to obey a Church law.
34. Since the issue of married priests is not a doctrine of the faith but merely a discipline, any Pope could change Church laws forbidding priests to marry. The Second Vatican Council stated in the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests that celibacy "is not indeed demanded by the very nature of the priesthood, as is evident from the practice of the primitive Church and from the tradition of the Eastern Churches . . . There also exist married priests of outstanding merit."
35. The people of God have a right to a sufficient number of priests to minister to their spiritual needs, as the Second Vatican Council stated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: "Lay persons have the right as Christians to receive in abundance from their pastors the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the Word of God and the sacraments."
36. Priests who drink to excess, priests who are proud, uncharitable, unjust and money-grasping, priests devoted to their own pleasure and comfort may be required to give up one assignment for another, due to such problems as scandal. But they are not required to give up their ministries. However, priests who ask and receive papal dispensation to marry must give up all ministerial assignments at once.
37. Many priests who have married with papal dispensation have asked to continue serving the Church at least as married deacons, but Rome has denied this permission.
38. In many dioceses and parishes, bishops and pastors have prohibited married priests even from exercising functions and ministries which lay persons regularly perform.
39. There are dioceses and parishes where bishops and pastors have acted from pastoral concern and have given meaningful ministries to priests who have married.
40. Some Catholics invite married priests to celebrate Mass in their homes. Some married priests celebrate the liturgy at home with their families and friends.
41. In some instances priests who have married have been denied a Catholic burial Mass because they had not received a papal dispensation.

V. SPIRITUAL LIFE

42. The Church will not ordain a young man who feels called to serve God in the priesthood unless he promises to obey the twelfth century law of celibacy. Catholic moral theologians and reputable psychiatrists argue that priesthood and celibacy are two separate vocations which should be kept distinct.
43. In its Declaration on Religious Freedom, the Second Vatican Council stated: "In all his activity a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God . . . It follows that he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience. Nor is he to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience, especially in matters religious." Priests too must deal with matters of conscience in their own lives.
44. Researchers find no evidence that priests who resign their ministerial assignments in order to marry are less mature or less stable emotionally than those who remain celibate.

45. Marriage has often aided persons to become more effective and affective ministers, missionaries and preachers.
46. When a priest marries, some lay persons who have known and respected him may grieve, not because he is being married, but because he will no longer be permitted to serve them as their priest.
47. Celibacy can sometimes be a hindrance to a priest's salvation.

VI. FINANCES

48. After having the laity contribute \$40,000 or more for a priest's education, Church authorities readily dismiss him from all ministry if he decides to marry.
49. As few as one hundred Protestant church members frequently support a married minister and family. Could Catholic parishes do the same if they adjusted some priorities?
50. Catholic priests who marry, even after thirty or more years of service to the Church, receive no pension from the Church. All other major denominations have a vested pension program for their clergy.

CONCLUSION

We hope the contents of this publication will encourage discussion about the utilization of married priests in the Church. We also hope such discussion will encourage action on this important issue at popular and authoritative levels in the Church for the spiritual good of the people of God.

SEVEN ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE

1. Write the following to express your opinion:

a) Pope John Paul II Apostolic Palace Vatican City	b) The Apostolic Delegate 3339 Massachusetts Ave., N.W. Washington, DC 20008	c) Your bishop (Ask your pastor for the address.)
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2. If your parish is closed or spiritual services are drastically reduced due to a shortage of celibate priests, keep telling your bishop that the parish must be kept open and the services supplied whether the priest be celibate or not.
3. Ask a married priest:
 - a) To lead a Scripture study group or a social action project in your neighborhood or parish;
 - b) To preside at an occasional liturgy in your home.
4. Help us to establish ministries for priests who have married:
 - a) Tell us of parishes in your diocese which cannot be staffed due to a shortage of celibate priests;
 - b) Tell us of bishops you know who might accept the help of married priests in administering some parishes;
 - c) Tell us of pastors who might welcome the help of a priest who has married;
 - d) Tell us of hospitals, nursing homes, colleges, military installations, apartment complexes, office buildings, etc. which might be eager to have a Catholic chaplain.
5. Tell your married priest friends about CORPUS. They may not know about us.
6. Request more copies of this publication or reproduce it yourself. Circulate it widely among family, friends and acquaintances.
7. Become a Friend of CORPUS. For more information, or for discussion of these questions, write:

CORPUS

P.O. BOX 2649 | CHICAGO, IL 60690