

Talking Points: Priesthood for Both Married and Celibate

Adapted from talking points prepared by FutureChurch. Projected trends based on data from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA): “Catholic Data, Catholic Statistics, Catholic Research,” <http://cara.georgetown.edu/bulletin/index.htm>. For statistics on 2012 ordinations, in the United States and worldwide, see <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/requestedchurchstats.html>.

Decide beforehand who in your group will focus on each point. Consider preparing charts or lists from current data to reference in the meeting and/or to leave behind as notes for the bishop.

Salvation of souls is the highest law of the Church (canon 1752).

- ❑ When there are not enough celibate priests to say Mass and provide the Eucharist to the faithful, allowing both married and celibate priests to minister affirms that the Mass and Eucharist are more important than mandatory celibacy.
- ❑ Sacraments are so important to our Catholic faith that Canon 1335 stipulates: “[The] prohibition [against married priests] is suspended whenever a member of the faithful requests a sacrament or sacramental or an act of governance; a person is permitted to request this for any just cause.”
- ❑ The Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the pastors out of the spiritual goods of the church, especially the Word of God and sacraments” (Canon 213).
- ❑ Pope John Paul II said that celibacy “does not belong to the essence of priesthood” (7/18/93 *New York Times*).

The worldwide shortage of priests is creating a crisis in the Church.

- ❑ According to CARA research, half of the 19,302 active diocesan priests in the United States plan to retire by 2019. Since the year 2000, the number of diocesan priests has dropped by about 4,000, and the number of ordinations remains below 500 per year.
- ❑ Even with parish closures reducing U.S. parishes to 17,644 by 2012, more than 3,000 of those parishes have no resident pastor and lay people (including religious sisters or brothers) run another 450 parishes. Worldwide, according to CARA, almost 50,000 parishes had no resident priest in 2012.
- ❑ According to Vatican statistics, between 1975 and 2008 the world's Catholics increased by 64%, from 709.6 million to 1.166 billion, but the number of priests increased by only 1%, from 404,783 to 409,166.

We see vibrant parishes closing, or being merged while our priests are exhausted from having too much to do with too little help.

- ❑ Give some examples from your diocese and/or relate a few anecdotes from your personal experience.

Given the obvious shortages, we do not understand why our Church does not consider a married priesthood.

- ❑ It seems as if Church leaders believe **mandatory celibacy is more important than the Mass and the Eucharist**. Considering that most of the apostles were married, that married clergy were common until the 12th century, that even today a married Protestant minister who converts can be ordained a priest, we wonder why married Catholic men cannot receive the same consideration. **When did celibacy become more important than the Eucharist?**
- ❑ We wonder why we are closing parishes rather than opening ordination, given that Jesus charged us to spread the good news and deliver a message of welcome and openness—not closed doors and shuttered windows.

We ask you as our bishop and our brother in Christ to begin a dialogue about restoring early Church traditions.

- ❑ Many lay people, as well as bishops and priests, have started talking about the need to restore our early traditions of permitting both married and celibate priests in our Church.
- ❑ We ask that you open this dialogue within [*your diocese*] and at the U.S. Bishops' Conference.

We join cardinals, bishops, and laity around the world who are asking for open discussion of optional celibacy.

- ❑ In 2010, three Belgium bishops, Patrick Hoogmarten (Hasselt,) Johan Bonny (Antwerp) and Jozef De Kesel (Bruges) questioned mandatory celibacy and said that married men should not automatically be excluded from the priesthood. (Reuters 9/22/10)
- ❑ The Indonesian Bishops Conference, the Brazilian Bishops Conference, and the Canadian Bishops Conference have called for discussion of optional celibacy. The USCCB should add its name to the list of those seeing this critical need.

Catholic laity support married priests.

- ❑ In a 2005 Gallup Survey, 68% of all U.S. Catholics registered at a parish reported their opinions about solutions to the priest shortage: 75% favored ordaining married men; 81% supported the return of priests who have married, 61% thought it would be good to ordain celibate women, and 54% approved of ordaining

married women. In comparison, only 40% thought it was okay to reduce Mass availability to less than once per week—yet that is what will happen, and has already happened, in parishes where no priest serves because none are available. (Study funded by *National Catholic Reporter* and published 9/30/2005.)

- ❑ Surveys during the past 20 years in Europe and the U.S. indicate that more than 60% of Catholics favor optional celibacy in the Church. (1997 international study published by Andrew Greeley of the University of Chicago and Michael Hout of U.C. Berkeley. Over the past 10 years, Gallup, *Newsweek* and the *National Catholic Reporter* have replicated these findings.)

We should return to the early Church custom of having both a celibate and a married priesthood.

- ❑ St. Peter was married but St. Paul was celibate and still the early Church flourished. Surely a return to this practice will not diminish today's Church.
- ❑ Because celibacy is a gift from the Holy Spirit, it will not disappear if removed as a requirement for diocesan priests. Indeed, it distorts the charism of celibacy to demand it of priests who are not called to celibacy.
- ❑ A priesthood with both the married and the celibate was common until the 12th century when celibacy became mandatory.

Although not specifically a part of the Talking Points for this topic, you may need to have handy the references that give the laity the right to address matters we find to be of concern. So here is one more point, which you may need to address “first” with some bishops.

The laity have a canonical right and obligation to speak up.

By the authority vested in us through our baptism and confirmation, we have the duty to explore different ways to ensure the Church remains healthy. Canon 212 tells us we have the right and obligation to make our views known on matters that concern the good of the Church.