

Tips for Meeting with Your Bishop

Adapted from tips prepared by FutureChurch

In 1980, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, at the request of the bishops of the United States, granted a “Pastoral Provision” allowing the Roman Catholic ordination of Episcopal priests who wished to become Catholics. Since then, hundreds of Episcopal priests have become Catholic priests. The same pastoral provision has been extended to many ministers of other Protestant denominations. Many, if not most, of these priests are married.

As part of our effort to obtain a similar pastoral provision for married Catholic men, we ask you to consider visiting your bishop to “make the case” for such a provision. Here are some tips that may help you organize the meeting. (They also are useful for any topic you wish to discuss with your bishop.)

Obtaining a Meeting

1. See if anyone in your group already has contacts in the chancery and/or is known as a credible person in the Arch/Diocese.
 - If so, have them call and ask the Arch/Bishop/Cardinal’s secretary to arrange a meeting for a fixed amount of time (30 minutes to 1 hour) on his calendar.
 - If no one has such connections, select one person to set up appointments and serve as the consistent contact with your group.
2. The bishop’s secretary probably will ask the purpose of the meeting. Simply say you and your group of three people (or four; this is the best size for the visiting group) will discuss concerns about parishes and staffing¹ in your diocese. (Do not elaborate on the topic—be clear about the intended content but save any arguments/proposals/observations for the meeting itself. This conversation is to set up a meeting, not to provide the content.)
3. If the Arch/Bishop/Cardinal refuses to meet or gives excuses, ask to meet with the vicar general or the chancellor. If they also are unavailable, ask to meet with anyone who IS available: head of diocesan personnel, head of parish life, president of the priests’ council, etc., for a request to consider ordaining married men; if your request differs seek the ones most appropriate as substitutes.
4. And if **no one** at all from the diocese will meet with you, consider adapting VOTF’s proposal to send as a letter from your group AND:

¹ Or whatever topic is the focus of the requested meeting.

- ❑ Send a copy to the Apostolic Nuncio in Washington, D.C.
- ❑ Send a copy to VOTF c/o Donna Doucette as well. (Depending on the responses we get, we will publish which bishops were willing to meet with their people about their Eucharistic future, and which were not.)

Preparing for the Date

5. When you do get a meeting with the Bishop or his designee, do your homework first:

- ❑ Review the letter you sent and the prepared Talking Points.
- ❑ Review priest shortage statistics from your diocese (you can find these at <http://futurechurch.org/fpm/corpus/prieststats/>). If somehow your diocese does not lack priests, review data on the global priest shortage and data on the shortages in other dioceses.

Note: Sometimes U.S. shortages are “corrected” by importing foreign priests who serve for a year or two at a time, or have come to learn English, study in a local university, and so on. This practice does not “solve” a shortage.

- ❑ **Know how numbers compare.** Sometimes bishops/spokespersons say that ordinations have increased in the last year or two, or that seminarian numbers are up. This again will not resolve the shortages if (a) the number of ordinations does not exceed the number of retiring (and dying) priests, (b) the increase does not match the current and the projected need for parish priests in the diocese, and/or (c) the increase includes those who will serve in dioceses or countries elsewhere rather than in your diocese. (If you cannot find these numbers beforehand, ask for them immediately if the bishop or spokesperson cites current ordinations in relation to shortages.)

Note: A bishop also may claim that Protestants too have a clergy shortage so that ordaining married men. Again, know the actual numbers. A 2003 article in *America* magazine, for example, found that only Catholics experience the shortage: http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=3311; Look for updated information prior to the meeting.

- ❑ Decide who will speak about which issues in the open letter, talking points, diocesan priest shortage, parish staffing issues, etc.
- ❑ For statistics on U.S. and global ordinations, number of parishes, and so on, see <http://cara.georgetown.edu/CARAServices/requestedchurchstats.html>

During the Meeting

6. Listen respectfully, be courteous but firm in your request that the bishop relay your message about the need for mature married men as priests to meet the severe threat the priest shortage poses to the future of Catholic parish and sacramental life.

7. If possible, get a commitment from the bishop that he will raise the priest shortage issue at all meetings of the U.S. bishops and that he will discuss VOTF's proposal for a new Pastoral Provision to ordain married Catholic men. Give a copy of the VOTF Proposal and any other pertinent materials to the bishop.
8. Thank the bishop for his time, tell him you will prepare a summary of the meeting and send it to him.

After the Meeting

9. Debrief with your group to decide:
 - What were the main points covered?
 - Who will prepare the summary report?
 - Who will send a follow-up summary to the bishop?
 - Any other follow-up needed?
10. Send the summary to the bishop and a copy to the VOTF office, c/o Donna B. Doucette, P.O. Box 423, Newton Upper Falls MA 02464.