

# **A Petition to the American Bishops for the Ordination to the Priesthood of Married Catholic Men in the United States**

Voice of the Faithful respectfully requests the American Bishops to make use of the Pastoral Provision for the Ordination of Married Catholic Men in the United States. The specific pastoral concern would be to obtain a new pool of candidates for the priesthood in order to ensure that the faithful have regular access to the Eucharist.

“I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world. ... He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal and I will raise him up on the last day.” — John 6: 51 & 54

Every Catholic understands the need for spiritual nourishment, especially for the regular reception of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist. We yearn for the holiness that comes from being nourished by the Eucharist. We also understand the responsibility of the bishops and priests to make the Eucharist available to the faithful.

“The Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the sacred pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments.” — Canon 213

Sadly, with the decline in the number of priests and the dramatic increase in the number of the faithful in the United States, and the closing and combining of parishes, the Eucharist will be less available to many in the coming years.

In order to satisfy the pastoral role in making the Eucharist available, Voice of the Faithful respectfully requests the American Bishops, through the USCCB, to petition the Vatican to allow the ordination to priesthood of married Catholic men in the United States.

The ordination of married Catholic men could easily be allowed by applying the same procedures used in the Pastoral Provisions that have allowed married Episcopalian, Anglican and other Protestant clergy to be ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. We are asking the American Bishops to seek Vatican approval for the use of one or both of the following options.

## **1. A New Pastoral Provision**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) would petition the Holy See to grant a new pastoral provision in favor of the grave ministerial needs of the Catholic faithful resulting from the scarcity of celibate priests in the United States. Under the present pastoral provision, in response to the request of a sponsoring bishop, the Holy See may grant a dispensation from the simple impediment of canon 1042, #1, i.e. “a man who has a wife,” to a married

former Episcopal sacred minister who is a candidate for the Catholic priesthood. Once a rescript for ordination has been received, the sponsoring bishop may proceed to the ordination of the candidate when all other conditions established by the bishop have been satisfied.

The new pastoral provision would operate in a manner similar to the present pastoral provision, except that the candidate seeking ordination to the priesthood would be a married Catholic man, rather than a married former Episcopal sacred minister. The procedures presently in place might apply where appropriate. For example, the candidate would need a sponsoring bishop who would express his intent to ordain a candidate to the priesthood, requesting receipt of a rescript for ordination from the Holy See. In addition, under the new pastoral provision, the permission of the candidate's wife would be required and an appropriate course of study and formation for the priesthood would be established by the bishop depending on the background of each candidate.

## **2. Support for the Actions of Individual Members of the USCCB**

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops might choose to refrain from any action of the entire body to request a general permission from the Holy See. In this case, the USCCB might resolve to provide fraternal support to brother bishops who individually might seek from the Holy See dispensations from the simple impediment of canon 1042, #1 to permit the ordination of married Catholic men for their dioceses. This model parallels closely the actions of individual bishops who have petitioned the Holy See and received rescripts for the ordination of sacred ministers of Christian communities which are not embraced by the current pastoral provision, for example, married former ministers of the Methodist, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches.

Support in this instance might include the use of both personal and material resources available to the USCCB: to develop common guidelines for requesting dispensations on behalf of married Catholic men; to make available the expertise of staff in individual dioceses as needed by bishops who choose to seek permission from the Holy See; to assist in the development of curricula; and to prepare appropriate information and educational materials for the media and for the faithful.

## **Conclusion**

The response of thousands of married Catholic men who have applied for the Permanent Diaconate over the past 50 years provides evidence that there are married men in the ranks of the American faithful who would make excellent candidates for the priesthood. Certainly in every diocese there are mature married men, with children or even grandchildren, who possess a deep Eucharistic spirituality and might consider ordination in order to provide the Eucharist to the faithful. We respectfully request the American Bishops to seek to make the latter possibility available to married Catholic men in the United States.