

Smelling Like Sheep, Married Priests, the Catholic Renewal Moment, and the New Evangelization of
Pope Francis: Equipping the Saints for a Work of Ministry, An Eye Witness Account

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Introduction

I come here today to give an eye witness account of the work of the Spirit in the Church and in my life as a man who was ordained to the Roman Catholic presbyterate for service in the Archdiocese of Boston, Massachusetts, USA. I was ordained on February 2, 1961, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, fifty four years ago. I stand here as a married man since June 14, 1969 a father of two sons and a daughter and a grandfather of two granddaughters and one grandson.

I believe that I am here today not simply in my own name but also in the name of thousands and thousands Latin Rite priests who have married during the span of these fifty years in response to the grace of the Second Vatican Council with its call for a New Pentecost and the personal commitment that entails. Over the span of these years since 1969 I have participated in the several national associations of married priests in the United States and have been privileged to serve as president of two of them, CORPUS, a National Association for an Inclusive Priesthood, organized in 1974 and the Federation of Christian Ministries, originally the Society of Priests for a Free Ministry, organized in 1968. I currently serve as a Trustee for Married Priests Now! USA, a Catholic Prelature of Sts. Peter and Paul based in metropolitan New York. I have also participated regularly in international meetings beginning in 1990 with the International Federation of Married Catholic Priests and its several regional associations including the International Federation for a Renewed Catholic Ministry which is based in London and which I serve currently as Secretary.

Since Vatican II over one hundred thousand Latin Rite priests have resigned (1), mostly to marry in response to the Vatican II's New Pentecost's call for authenticity. This was in part a gift of the Ressourcement movement led largely by Yves Congar, OP (2). This return to the sources of Catholic faith in scripture and tradition opened up a new realization of the freedom and responsibility of the individual Christian as a disciple of Jesus Christ enabled by one's faith and a Baptism in the Spirit (3).

Thesis

Pope Francis in **The Joy of the Gospel** (4) and elsewhere (5) has called for a missionary New Evangelization by the entire Church. He said: "An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, is willing to abase itself if necessary and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers take on "the smell of the sheep" and the sheep are willing to hear their voice." It is the contention of this paper that many of the married priests whom I represent, precisely because of the conversions they have experienced in becoming married priests and what they have had to endure as persons marginalized, discriminated against and ostracized, are particularly well equipped to "smell like the sheep" in this Catholic renewal moment. As married men these priests are usually marginalized by the official Church. They have entered the postmodern world of ordinary working persons where they must fend for themselves and their families as best they can.

Who Are These Married Priests; Quitters or Prophetic Pioneers?

It has been sometimes asserted that resigned priests are quitters who have turned their backs on the Faith and on the Church and are just men in pursuit of their own satisfactions. While that may be true of some, such is not the case for the majority as sociological research has demonstrated (6). The decision to leave the ranks of the Catholic clergy is a momentous one which changes one's life forever and is the result of faith related personal changes or conversions which have already taken place. The two principal reasons given for resigning from the canonical ministry were the desire to marry and the structure and practice of the exercise of authority in the Church (7). These issues relate directly to the need for personal autonomy and intimate relationships which are the two basic needs of the human person in one's transcendent growth as an individual self (8). This research shows that a large number of married priests continue to maintain an identity as a priest. One third of the respondents see themselves as engaged in new forms of priestly ministry. 67 percent described their present occupation as reminiscent of the worker-priests of France (9) & (10).

What to Make of This: a Way of Looking at Things

The two principal problems expressed by the 6,000 priests studied in the 1972 NORC survey of United States Catholic priests were exclusion from decision making or power sharing and the desire to marry blocked by mandatory celibacy (11). Both of these problems are basically related to autonomy or capacity for one's own decision making and affiliation or relationship making, basic psychological needs which are inhibited or blocked by the Church's present power structure. When a person addresses issues of autonomy and affiliation he is in the realm of conscience which is radically fundamental to his/her personhood and authenticity as a person (12). Erik Erikson speaks of the stages of psycho-social development in which one's identity comes into being along a continuum of challenges or crises such as those addressed by the resignees (13). The root cause of each resignees' decision is the call of conscience to seek the good and reject the less good as part of every human's natural orientation to self-transcendence (14). Here in England one remembers the toast of John Henry Cardinal Newman "To conscience first, then the Pope" which John Cardinal Heenan, Archbishop of Westminster quoted at Vatican II as noted by Yves Congar, OP in his Vatican II journal (15). Conscience for Walter Conn is the human person precisely as valuer (16). Such acts of conscience are conversions in which horizons change and transformation takes place (17).

Different Lenses and a Different Recognition

Bernard Lonergan, SJ speaks of three kinds of conversions: intellectual, moral, and religious (18). Intellectual conversion is searching for truth as one moves from illusion to reality. Moral conversion is searching for value as one moves from sense satisfaction to values. Gradually one learns that with "deliberation, evaluation, decision, action, we can know and do, not just what pleases us, but is truly good, worthwhile" (19). Walter Conn notes that this self-control is evidence of an underlying process of affective conversion that transforms a person into a being-in-love which makes possible the commitment to the pursuit of moral perfection (20). Development in this new modality of self-transcendence requires that one has to root out and free oneself from one's individual, group and general bias (21). This is a metanoia experience of a change of mind and heart, a turning inside out, of which the New Testament speaks (Mk. 1: 14-15). Religious or affective conversion is searching for love. For Lonergan it is entering the world of the sacred and being met by it and consequently falling in love in the meeting (22). All of these are experiences of self-transcendence and horizon transformation reminiscent of the Lukan story of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus. They, disappointed in the loss of their hopes with the death of Jesus, are met by a stranger who in dialogue with them transforms their

lives and gives them new graceful horizons (Lk. 24:13-35). The married priest who desires to continue service as a priest has had such a transformative experience in his loss and gain and thereby is able to tell his newly human divine story as an experience of Good News. Such men have had their eyes opened by the Ressourcement theologians. Their hearts have been changed by experiences of intimacy forbidden by an unscriptural and unjust mandatory celibacy which has been seen for what it has become, an instrument of multidimensional control, and rejected. Their heart and minds have been freed to love God with all that they are. They, in fact, have a new mission for in their daily lives they are anticipating a new model of priesthood called for by Vatican II in its **Decree on Priests**, # 22: "This same Holy Spirit while impelling the Church to open new avenues of approach to the contemporary world is also suggesting and fostering fitting adaptations in the ministry of priests." (23)

Keeping Hope Alive: Hearing Prophets Speak

Married priests have kept their hope alive by maintaining Koinonia in our regional, national and international married priests associations around the world. Given Pope Francis' appeal for shepherds who smell like their sheep some excerpts from the 1st International Congress of Married Catholic Priests and Spouses in 1987 are particularly relevant to our thesis that married priests have a prophetic ministry of evangelization.

The Church: What married priests and their wives have experienced does not concern us alone. How married priests and their wives are living is fundamental for the whole Church: how to integrate into the life of faith the whole of human life, sexuality, work, social and economic relationships. We are able to speak a new language. The reality of our family life pushes us to interpret and formulate in today's language the Good News which we discover with others, like a father of a family 'who brings out of his storehouse both new things and old' (Mt. 13:51). We are priests at the service of the people, and as such we are taking part in the renewal of the Church.

Marriage and Family: We are happy to have chosen to unite marriage and priesthood. We believe that such a union of charisms renews both the sacraments of marriage and priesthood at once and leads to a new experience of God. This makes us understand better the conjugal love of God and God's people, as the biblical image puts it.

Marriage has made us more human. This incarnation has brought us closer to God. It has made us less abstract and more sensitive to others. Our experience has made us, as men, discover the richness of woman. As a human person she was previously considered inferior but is now recognized as a full partner, with a total respect for her own personality without which there is no complete humanity according to God's plan.

Work: Our entry into the world of work, both as a means of earning a living and of being able to help others, has contributed to our maturity and to our development. Our insertion into concrete everyday life aids the announcement of the Good News, since we are closer to our brothers and can gain their confidence. This also gives another dimension to prayer (24).

Pastoral Initiatives

The United States with its broad diversity of cultures and multiplicity of religious groups has been a rich seed bed for pastoral initiatives by married priests beginning in 1968 with the Society of Priests for a Free Ministries which became the Federation of Christian Ministries (FCM) (25). FCM created the initial

groundwork for a continuation of priestly ministry with its ecumenically based ministerial certification program which is recognized by civil authorities. It is now recognized civilly as a convention of churches which are house churches and small faith communities. FCM is also nationally recognized as an official Endorser for institutional chaplaincies. The Corps of Reserve Priests United for Service (CORPUS) emerged as the largest married priests association with 10,000 persons on its mailing list which included the national hierarchy and 4,000 members (26). It's **Pastoral Ministry and the Non-Clerical Priesthood, a Theological and Canonical Reflection** in 1989 has served as its "Magna Carta" (27). It provided theological and canonical justification for an explicit ministry by married priests authorized by 27 canons in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. Obviously it contradicted the official practice of denial of such capabilities but it was not attacked by the hierarchy. In practice it is probable that not many married priests acted publicly on its basis but felt reassured that they could in good conscience if need be. In 1990 CORPUS published a Membership Directory listing 1,060 entries which represented a large portion of its married priest members. Its purpose was to serve as a vehicle for contact for its members and information for the general public who wished to avail themselves of pastoral care and sacramental services. Both FCM and CORPUS published newsletters regularly and held annual national conferences. Rent-A-Priest aka Celibacy Is The Issue (CITI) served and serves primarily as a resource for marriage ministries and marriages numbering in the thousands. It had a particularly effective outreach program (28). Married Priests Now! a Catholic Prelature of Sts. Peter and Paul maintains a network of ministries both nationally and internationally including Jubilee House, a house church drawing its membership from the national capital region of Washington, DC (29).

A Proposal

Our efforts as married priest families have done some good here and there. However, I suggest that the best is yet to come and in a larger way by the unique grace of God in the call of Pope Francis for shepherds who smell like marginalized sheep. The smell is the gift of our loss of status and institutional support which requires us to live by faith alone on the margins of the Church. From the vantage point of faith, we certainly seem to fit the job description for what Pope Francis has in mind. In the United States we are seeking a new collaboration with canonical priests associations to bring to our bishops a proposal to use us as sheep-smelling shepherds in a New Evangelization pastoral initiative. We are doing this in response to a call for the utilization of married priests by the Chair of the Leadership Team of the Association of United States Catholic Priests on June 16, 2015 in the light of the catastrophic sacramental drought and Eucharistic starvation (30). Clearly this would be the start of brotherly reconciliation between the married-priests community and the hierarchy. Might this not be a sign of the mercy of God breaking through the state of mutual resentments which have impeded progress in the past in responding to the needs of God's people (31)?

Perhaps the United Kingdom's Advent Group (32) and the Movement for a Married Clergy (33) might consider something similar. The July 9, 2015 issue of the Tablet headlined "Married Priests: The Bishops Speak Out in Support". We are proposing that married priests groups collaborate with canonical priests associations in assisting the National Bishops Conference in preparing a proposal for the utilization of married priests. We are suggesting a White Paper Integration Plan for Using Married Priests in Catholic parishes which would address issues and models. We are offering a Draft Outline to start the discussion.

Models:

1. Priest has family and is full time salaried in parish ministry.

2. Priest has family and is part time salaried in parish ministry.
3. Priest has family and a job, and volunteers (like many current deacons) 4-6 hours per week.

Issues:

- Vetting of priests who left active ministry in order to determine their suitability and willingness to participate positively, the kind of ministry that is suitable for their ministry skills, and to begin an ongoing updating process commensurate with their time commitment.
- Developing agreements to focus on the urgent pastoral needs of God's people and not to involve themselves in discussions of institutional issues unless their involvement is requested by the institution.
- Recruiting priests who are available for one of the models, who are vetted, and who will sign an agreement.

Conclusion

There has been no dialogue between the married priest communities as such and their fellow Roman Catholics. It is time to begin such dialogue. The married priests' phenomenon is a partial source of the need for Catholic Renewal which our departures have fueled. The married priest phenomenon is a resource for the Spirit of Catholic Renewal in the current Catholic Moment because we are shepherds who smell like sheep. Richard A. Schoenherr believes that the deeper structural implications of the acceptance of the regularization of married priests and the elimination of mandatory celibacy will open the door to the ordination of women and the eventual elimination of patriarchy in the Church and ultimately, as leaven in the dough, in civil society which is crucial to human welfare (34). We see in this movement a deep design of God's providence. Married priests families have been and are a prophetic sign pointing to renewal in the Roman Catholic Church. –finis-

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Notes

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