Opinion
Vatican



by NCR Staff

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The possibility of married priests and women deacons were discussed numerous times during the synod on the Amazon last month and the ideas are still floating around the church (see this just published column from Phyllis Zagano). NCR readers had a lot to say on both topics. Letters to the editor are edited for length and clarity.

If married men and women were ordained, their children and grandchildren would be encouraged to attend church and might encourage other young persons to attend. There would not be the expense of a rectory either.

Currently 96% of persons attending Sunday service have grey hair. The pope can change church law and should in this case. Why do the Canadian bishops not speak out for this change?

JACK MURPHY

Meteghan Centre, Nova Scotia

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When looking at the question of married priests, one need look no further than the foot of the Ccross. There were four people there (Matthew 27, 55,56; Mark 15, 40, 41; Luke 23, 49; John 19, 25, 26) and it was a woman, not a man, who brought the good news of Jesus' resurrection on Easter Sunday. The men were all cowering, and apparently still are.



Supposed theological arguments to support celibacy are at best bogus. Celibacy was instituted to keep possession of church real estate in the hands of the church, rather than have it devolve into the hands of a priest's wife. Read the history.

EUGENE McMANUS

Caribou Island, Nova Scotia

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As a committed Catholic woman who has given much time and talent to our diverse faith communities of over 60 years, I see the end of parishes as a supportive and encouraging faith community. The majority of our bishops are such poorly trained and unloving pastors for their priests, so non-responsive to the faithful in their diocese, embedded in career, position and unfounded power. The ministry of women in our church is undervalued and devoid of real influence. Clericalism is a cancer destroying our spirit.

But we will find relationships and leadership that nurtures rather than destroys and undermines our faith — my personal search. Women religious, their continued work and their writings are a source of hope and encouragement. My children watch the church they were raised in from afar and have a curiosity about its dissolution.

They were raised in the hopeful, alive church of the 1970s and 1980s, exhibit the social justice and ethical stances they were taught both at home and in their Catholic school. I am proud of them and sadly understand their unwillingness to be part of a church that rejected their LGBT friends and undermined the confidence of women.

MARY REEVES

Grand Bay Westfield, New Brunswick

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As a Catholic male, I have savored non-celibacy, and have lived happily within its gifts for many decades, including the joy of marital sex and the privilege of fatherhood. My seven grandchildren (age 26-12) are some of the greatest joys of my life. I consider my choice to marry to have solidly enhanced my personal spirituality and the manner in which I have expressed it over the years.

Pope Francis recently said a theologian he is currently reading mentioned the possibility of ordaining "an older, married man … but only for the exercise of the sanctifying munus: namely, celebrating the Mass, administering the sacrament of reconciliation and giving unction to the sick."

Is non-celibacy so evil that we must wait for a crisis in the church (unavailability of the Eucharist due to priest shortage) to permit "an older, married man" to be

considered acceptable for the priesthood? Does a man's advancing age somehow qualify him for priesthood, and then only out of desperation? Am I expected to be not offended by such rhetoric?

Are we to believe that only celibate males are called to priesthood? Are we also to believe that women don't ever experience the call to priesthood? Is there a better way for me to be told I am a second-class Catholic?

DICK LENSING

Marion, Iowa

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I'm very excited about the idea of female deacons. I think women have a lot to offer the church.

However, I believe priests should remain celibate. I want my priest to be able to focus on his flock and duties undistracted by his own family issues and problems.

JC BOOKER

San Diego, California

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Many people don't seem to be aware that most of the apostles/disciples of Jesus were married. This St. Paul alludes to in his letter to the Corinthians (I Cor. 9:5-6).

In the western church, popes, bishops and priests were married for more than 1,000 years. The official church was influenced by Pope Damasus (366-384), who taught that spiritual fatherhood was more important than biological fatherhood. He prohibited priests in Rome from marrying.

Damasus, unfortunately, adopted some ideas from the Gnostic heresy. He taught that it was important to preserve priests' "cultic purity." Damasus believed that sexual intercourse made a man unclean and unsuited for priestly service.

In Spain, from the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633, bishops and priests were required to take a vow of chastity for life.

It was not until the year 1139 that the Second Lateran Council definitively settled the question of celibacy in the western church. The council declared that any marriage of the clergy as invalid as a matter of church law.

As had been pointed out by other writers here, priestly celibacy is a matter of church discipline and can be changed.

(Sr.) CHARLENE OZANICK, CSSF

New Kensington, Pennsylvania

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The recommendation made by the Synod of Bishops on the Amazon to allow married permanent deacons to become priests is a measure far too tentative and uninformed. It does not give an adequate response to the pressing need of providing adequate pastoral services in areas experiencing priest shortages.

Most troubling is the notion that married permanent deacons becoming priests is somehow the solution. In making their recommendation, the bishops revealed their own insufficient understanding of the nature and theology of the permanent diaconate. Their suggestion is nothing more than a half-measured reaction; one devoid of more bold steps which would actually alleviate the pastoral draught being experienced by Catholics in the Amazon region. To recommend that married permanent deacons become priests is to totally misunderstand the meaning of "permanent."

The order of deacons is an order of service. It is not a priestly order. Permanent deacons are called to a ministry of service (diaconia), not to a sacerdotal ministry. To suggest that we take from the permanent diaconate to add to the presbyterate is tantamount to saying that the service ministry provided by the order of deacons is secondary in importance to the ministry provided by the order of priests.

For anyone to suggest to me that I could or should become a priest in order to help relieve a shortage of priests would be anathema. I am a permanent deacon. Permanent means permanent. The bishops are missing an opportunity to call forth, form and ordain married men from within Amazonian communities who actually sense a call to the priesthood instead of siphoning off permanent deacons.

(Deacon) ROBERT F. COLEMAN

Sydney, Nova Scotia

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Opponents of women's ordination insist that men and women are intrinsically different. If this is true, then how can an all-male hierarchy speak for people intrinsically different from them? There's only one answer to this riddle: women must be somehow unqualified to understand and express their own experience of God's action in their lives, while men — though intrinsically different — are somehow abundantly capable of doing so for women.

If women are so muddled in self-understanding that men must explain for them who they are, especially in relation to God, women cannot be anything but subordinate creatures. Therefore, using intrinsic difference to argue against women's leadership is to argue tacitly for the innate inferiority of women.

To be fair, the idea of women being equal to men is a relatively new concept, the implications of which are still being unpacked. For example, the intrinsic difference argument yields strikingly new conclusions in light of women's equal standing with men. If women and men are intrinsically different and nonetheless equal, then it follows we must ordain women, lest our faith be bereft of half of humanity's intrinsically unique wisdom and insight.

Self-understanding and spirituality emerge, not in a vacuum, but in a community of others. Women have and continue to benefit from the wisdom and guidance of men. The error is in believing the favor cannot be returned. All of us, women and men, need women's wisdom and guidance in leadership as well.

MAGGIE MEIER

Los Alamos, New Mexico

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Am I the only one who is not impressed that the pope is "allowing" priests in the Amazon to be married?

Really, since when is it OK for some, finally, and not all to be "allowed" to be all they are and inspire to be?

It is very hollow in the first place that priests are not "allowed" to be married — not to mention female priests. If it is OK for one then it is OK for all. What a shallow mandate. Do the Roman Catholic hierarchy not understand human nature?

Any religion that does not acknowledge the rights of all, LGBTQ, male or female, black or white, will find that its members are being enlightened by information and insights of the 21st century and beyond and will not tolerate such discrimination and indignities.

Once again, certain men are dictating the rights of all human beings.

ANNE HARTER

Belleville, Illinois

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Recently I was sent a copy of this article by Fr. Blake Britton of the Orlando Diocese which was published at the Word on Fire website.

I could not agree more: a vocation to celibacy is a great gift given by God. However, where I believe Britton and many in the Roman Rite fall into error is in their seeming assumption that God gives the call to celibacy to every man to whom God gives a call to priesthood. Clearly this is not the case.

I would like to quote the late Metropolitan Archbishop of Winnipeg and Canadian Primate of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Maxim Hermaniuk. At the western Canadian bishops' conference in the early 1990s, he was asked his opinion on a proposal that mature married men of the Inuit in the far north of Canada be admitted to Holy Orders as priests.

This was his response: "we know that the call to Holy Matrimony is a gift of God. And we know that the call to the Holy Priesthood is also a gift of God. Furthermore, we know that God sometimes gives both these gifts to the same man. Who are we to interfere with the gifts of God?"

Let any man who discerns a call to the priesthood as well as a call to celibacy embrace both with his whole heart. Let any man who is called to the priesthood and

the call to matrimony embrace both gifts with his whole heart. Both of these men will be doing the will of God.

(Fr.) KENNETH E. OLSEN

Springfield, Oregon

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